THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË



Elizabeth Gaskell

With an Introduction and Notes
by Anne Taranto

George Stade
Consulting Editorial Director



Barnes & Noble Classics
New York

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Table of Contents

FROM THE PAGES OF THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË
Title Page
Copyright Page
ELIZABETH GASKELL
THE WORLD OF ELIZABETH GASKELL AND THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË
Introduction

THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË,

CHAPTER I.
CHAPTER II.
CHAPTER III.
CHAPTER IV.
CHAPTER V.
- The History of the Year 1829.
- THE WOUNDED STAG.

CHAPTER VI.
CHAPTER VII.
CHAPTER VIII.
- (Written In Pencil to a Friend.)
- (To Emily, About This Time.)

CHAPTER IX.
CHAPTER X.
CHAPTER XI.
CHAPTER XII.
CHAPTER XIII.
CHAPTER XIV.

THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË,

CHAPTER I.
CHAPTER II.
To Messrs. Smith and Elder.
To Messrs. Smith and Elder.
To Messrs. Smith and Elder.
Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co.
Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co.
Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co.
Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co.
To Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co.
To Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co.
To G. H. Lewes, Esq.
To W. S. Williams, Esq.
To G. H. Lewes, Esq.
To G. H. Lewes, Esq.
To W S. Williams, Esq.
CHAPTER III.
From Anne Brontë.
CHAPTER IV.
To W.S. Williams, Esq.
To G. H. Lewes, Esq.
CHAPTER V.
To G. H. Lewes, Esq.
To G. H. Lewes, Esq.
CHAPTER VI.
CHAPTER VII.
CHAPTER VIII.
CHAPTER IX.
CHAPTER X.
CHAPTER XI.
To G. Smith, Esq.
To W. S. Williams, Esq.
CHAPTER XII.
To G. Smith, Esq.
To W. S. Williams, Esq.
CHAPTER XIII.

To Miss Wooler.
CHAPTER XIV.

ENDNOTES
THE LEGACY OF THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË
COMMENTS & QUESTIONS
FOR FURTHER READING

FROM THE PAGES OF THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

The parsonage stands at right angles to the road, facing down upon the church; so that, in fact, parsonage, church, and belfried school-house, form three sides of an irregular oblong, of which the fourth is open to the fields and moors that lie beyond. (page 13)

For a right understanding of the life of my dear friend, Charlotte Brontë, it appears to me more necessary in her case than in most others, that the reader should be made acquainted with the peculiar forms of population and society amidst which her earliest years were passed, and from which both her own and her sisters' first impressions of human life must have been received. (page 18)

Children leading a secluded life are often thoughtful and dreamy: the impressions made upon them by the world without—the unusual sights of earth and sky—the accidental meetings with strange faces and figures—(rare occurrences in those out-of-the-way places)—are sometimes magnified by them into things so deeply significant as to be almost supernatural. (page 74)

"Human affairs are mutable, and human resolutions must bend to the course of events. We are all about to divide, break up, separate. Emily is going to school, Branwell is going to London, and I am going to be a governess." (page 107)

"I am no teacher; to look on me in that light is to mistake me. To teach is not my vocation. What I am, it is useless to say. Those whom it concerns feel and find it out." (page 326)

“I want us all to get on. I know we have talents, and I want them to be turned to account.” (page 166)

“Perfection is not the lot of humanity; and as long as we can regard those we love, and to whom we are closely allied, with profound and never-shaken esteem, it is a small thing that they should vex us occasionally by what appear to us unreasonable and headstrong notions.”

(page 231)

“There is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman, who makes her way through life quietly, perseveringly, without support of husband or brother.” (page 232)

She went on with her work steadily. But it was dreary to write without any one to listen to the progress of her tale,—to find fault or to sympathise,—while pacing the length of the parlour in the evenings, as in the days that were no more. Three sisters had done this,—then two, the other sister dropping off from the walk,—and now one was left desolate, to listen for echoing steps that never came,—and to hear the wind sobbing at the windows, with an almost articulate sound. (pages 317—318)

The characters were her companions in the quiet hours, which she spent utterly alone, unable often to stir out of doors for many days together. The interests of the persons in her novels supplied the lack of interest in her own life; and Memory and Imagination found their appropriate work, and ceased to prey upon her vitals. But too frequently she could not write, could not see her people, nor hear them speak; a great mist of headache had blotted them out; they were non existent to her. (page 402)

I appeal to that larger and more solemn public, who know how to look with tender humility at faults and errors; how to admire generously extraordinary

genius, and how to reverence with warm, full hearts all noble virtue. To that Public I commit the memory of Charlotte Brontë. (page 454)

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FIRST PRINTING

ELIZABETH GASKELL

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson was born in London in 1810, the daughter of Unitarian parents. Her father chose a variety of different careers, including experimental farming, preaching in the Unitarian church, and writing for various periodicals. Her mother died the year after Elizabeth was born, and of the eight children she bore, only two survived childhood. Elizabeth was raised by her maternal aunt, Hannah Holland Lumb, whose farm in rural Knutsford provided a serene and happy childhood for the young girl. Unitarians believed in education for girls, and after lessons at home Elizabeth was further educated at a progressive boarding school.

Elizabeth's ties to her brother John were kept up through letters and occasional visits. After setting sail for India in 1828, he disappeared without a trace, leaving Elizabeth stunned and her father in deep depression. Her father's failing health compelled Elizabeth to travel to London to nurse him until his death the following year. After his death, Elizabeth visited a variety of cultured family members, and met William Gaskell, an assistant Unitarian preacher in Manchester, whom she wed in 1832.

Although the Industrial Revolution thrummed in the background of her childhood, it was William's Manchester congregation that first put Gaskell in touch with the grim realities of factory work. Cotton mills dominated the labor force in the city, and filthy shanty towns housed thousands of exploited, undernourished mill workers. William and Elizabeth were kept busy by their congregation and by their efforts to address the social problems that plagued the booming industrial city of Manchester. Although she had written only personal diaries, and was also busy raising her own family in the early years of her marriage, Gaskell's community work inspired her to collaborate with her husband on the narrative poem "Sketches Among the Poor, No. 1," which was published in 1837.

Gaskell's happy, busy life was interrupted by tragedy in 1845 when her infant son died of scarlet fever while on a family vacation. Overcome by grief, Gaskell followed her husband's advice and became absorbed in her writing. The result was her first novel, *Mary Barton: A Tale of* a

Manchester Life (1848), which earned her instant success—and hostile criticism from the cotton mill owners whom she so unsparingly portrayed. Gaskell went on to write six other novels: *Cranford* (1853), *Ruth* (1853), *North and* South (1855), Sylvia's *Lovers* (1863), *Cousin Phyllis* (1864), and *Wives and Daughters* (1866). She also wrote numerous short stories, as well as a famous biography of her friend, *The Life of Charlotte* Brontë (1857). Much of Gaskell's short fiction appeared in popular literary journals, and several of her novels were serialized in those publications. Gaskell's works were popular during her lifetime and received critical acclaim as well. Friendships with literary giants of the day—including Charles Dickens, who also published her work in his journals—aided her career, and frequent travels throughout Europe gave her material for her writing and eased the strains of an extremely busy life. Gaskell had six children, four of whom, all daughters, lived to be adults.

In 1865 Gaskell bought a country house in Hampshire as a surprise for her husband's retirement. By then her last novel, Wives and Daughters, was being serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine.* Physically exhausted, and yet to complete the final installment of her novel, Elizabeth Gaskell died suddenly on a visit to the house on November 12, 1865. Although never completed, *Wives and Daughters* is considered by many to be a study in character on a par with the novels of George Eliot and Jane Austen. Elizabeth Gaskell was buried at Brook Street Chapel in Knutsford.

THE WORLD OF ELIZABETH GASKELL AND THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË

1800 The Napoleonic Wars begin.

1810 Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson is born on September 29 in London to Unitarian parents. She is her parents' eighth and last child.

1811 Elizabeth's mother dies, and she is taken in by her mother's sister, Hannah Holland Lumb, in the town of Knutsford in Cheshire. Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* is published.

1812 Charles Dickens, future publisher and friend of Elizabeth Gaskell, is born.

1814 Elizabeth's father remarries. Elizabeth remains in Knutsford with her aunt.

1815 Anthony Trollope is born. The Napoleonic Wars end with the Battle of Waterloo.

1816 Charlotte Brontë is born on April 21 in Thornton, England, the third of six children of the Reverend Patrick and Maria Branwell Brontë.

1817 Patrick Branwell Brontë is born.

1818 Emily Brontë is born.

1819 Novelist George Eliot (pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans) is born. John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" is published. Victoria, the future queen, is born.

1820 Anne Brontë is born, and the Brontë family moves to Haworth,

where Reverend Brontë has been offered a lifetime curacy. Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is published.

1821 Charlotte's mother, Maria, dies, and her sister, Elizabeth Branwell, moves into the Brontë household to help raise the six young children.

1822 Elizabeth Gaskell enters the liberal-minded Avonbank School at Stratford-on-Avon, where she spends the next five years absorbed in her studies. She receives an excellent education, unlike many girls of her generation.

1825 Maria and Elizabeth Brontë contract what is probably tuberculosis and die. Charlotte and Emily are pulled out of school to return home to Haworth.

1826 The four surviving Brontë siblings create the "Young Men" plays, the first of their imaginative fictional writings, which are followed in 1827 by "Our Fellows" and "The Islanders."

1828 Tragedy grips the Stevenson family when John disappears on a trip with the East India Company to India. Elizabeth travels to London to nurse her father, whose health is deteriorating.

1829 William Stevenson dies, and Elizabeth lives with a distant relative, Unitarian minister William Turner. She is exposed to a socially progressive and intellectual way of life that will inform her fictional works.

1830 Modern rail travel begins in England.

1831 On a trip to Manchester, Elizabeth meets her future husband, William Gaskell, an assistant minister at an important Unitarian center, the Cross Street Chapel.

1832 Elizabeth and William Gaskell marry in Knutsford. After their honeymoon in Wales, they reside in Manchester. The First

Reform Act redistributes parliamentary seats and extends voting rights for the middle classes.

1833 Gaskell suffers the stillborn birth of her first child. Slavery is abolished in the British Empire.

1834 A daughter, Marianne, is born to Gaskell.

1835 Charlotte Brontë teaches at Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head.

1836 Gaskell writes the poem "On Visiting the Grave of My Stillborn Little Girl, Sunday July 4th, 1836."

1837 The narrative poem "Sketches Among the Poor, No. 1," which Gaskell wrote with her husband, is published by Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine.* A daughter, Margaret Emily, known as Meta, is born. Charlotte Brontë writes to Robert Southey, the British poet laureate, to ask his opinion of her poetry. His disheartening response implies that while Charlotte displays what Wordsworth calls "faculty of verse," this is nothing extraordinary in a time of so many successful poets. He goes on to declare that women have no place in the business of literature. Queen Victoria assumes the throne of England.

1838 Charlotte resigns from her teaching position at Miss Wooler's school. Dickens's *Oliver Twist* is published.

1839 Charlotte works for the next three years as a governess, first in Lothersdale and later in Rawdon.

1840 "Clopton Hall," a short essay recalling a visit to Clopton House during Gaskell's school days, is included in William Howitt's *Visits to Remarkable Places.* Thomas Hardy is born.

1842 A daughter, Florence, is born to Gaskell. Charlotte and Emily Brontë travel to Brussels to study at Pensionnat Heger, where they read, among other things, works by French and German

Romantics. They stay less than a year, returning to Haworth because their aunt Elizabeth Branwell has died.

1843-1844 Charlotte spends a second year at the Pensionnat in Brussels honing her French and German language skills. She develops a strong emotional attachment to her married employer and former teacher, Constantin Heger. Charlotte returns to Haworth in January 1844. A son, William, is born to Gaskell in 1844.

1845 While on family vacation in Wales, the infant William contracts scarlet fever and dies. Gaskell distracts herself from her grief by focusing on her writing. Friedrich Engels's Die Lage der *arbeitenden Klasse in England (The Condition of the Working Class in England)* is published.

1846 A daughter, Julia Bradford, is born to Gaskell. In February, Charlotte sends a manuscript, *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* (the pen names of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, respectively), to the London publisher Aylott and Jones. The poems are published in May at the sisters' expense; only two copies are sold. In June Charlotte completes her first novel, *The Professor.* By the end of the year she has begun work on *Jane Eyre.*

1847 Gaskell's "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras" appears in Howitt's *Journal*, published by fellow Unitarian William Howitt. While Charlotte's manuscript for *The Professor* is rejected by various publishers, her sisters' novels—Anne's *Agnes Grey* and Emily's Wuthering *Heights—are* accepted for publication by Thomas Cautley Newby. Charlotte approaches another publisher, Smith, Elder, with Jane *Eyre*, which is published in October to instant success, overshadowing the publication in December of her sisters'

novels and surpassing them in acclaim. All three sisters are still publishing under their "Bell" pen names.

1848 Gaskell's first novel, *Mary Barton: A Tale of* a *Manchester Life*, is published anonymously, although the author's identity is immediately uncovered. The sympathetic portrait of mill workers and their unbearable living conditions infuriates Manchester factory owners. Amid growing rumors that there is only one "Bell" writer, Charlotte and Anne travel to London to prove otherwise. Charlotte's publisher, George Smith, learns the truth of the Brontës' identities but is sworn to protect their secret. In September, Branwell Brontë dies after a sustained bout of depression, alcoholism, and drug use; in December, Emily dies of tuberculosis. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei (Communist Manifesto)* is published. Major rebellions take place in France, Austria, Prussia, and other European countries. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* is published.

1849 Gaskell's writing finds many admirers, and she meets Dickens, Thackeray, and Wordsworth, among other well-known authors. In May, Anne Brontë dies of tuberculosis. Charlotte's novel *Shirley* is published by Smith, Elder. In November, Charlotte travels again to London, this time as a successful author. She, like Gaskell, meets one of her literary idols, William Makepeace Thackeray.

1850 Charlotte returns to London. In August, she travels to Windermere, where she and Elizabeth Gaskell meet for the first time. The two will become close friends. In December, Charlotte writes the prefaces and biographical notes for her sisters' novels; she reveals the true identities of the "Bells" and works to protect the posthumous reputations of Emily and Anne, who have received some criticism for their "coarse" and "nihilisbtic" writings. Several of Gaskell's works, including "The Heart of John Middleton," are published in Charles Dickens's weekly journal *Household Words. The Moorland Cottage,* a novella, is published in book form.

1851 The first two chapters of Cranford—often considered Gaskell's most popular work—are published in *Household Words* (the final installments will appear in 1853). "The Deserted Mansion" appears in Fraser's *Magazine.*

1853 Gaskell's *Ruth* is published in book form; the novel stirs controversy because it questions the conventional wisdom that the life of a "fallen woman" necessarily ends in ruin. Cranford is published in book form. The stories "Cumberland Sheep Shearers" and "The Squire's Story," among others, appear in *Household Words.* Charlotte's novel *Villette* is published in January. In April, Charlotte and Gaskell spend a week together in Manchester; in September, Gaskell visits Charlotte at Haworth.

1854 Gaskell's novel *North and South,* which addresses social problems, is serialized in *Household Words.* Gaskell meets Florence Nightingale in London. In June, Charlotte marries Arthur Bell Nicholls, whom she has known since 1845, when he began work as a curate at Haworth.

1855 Charlotte is happily married for a few months, but early in the year she becomes ill; she dies on March 31. Her father asks Gaskell to write Charlotte's biography North *and South* is published in book form, and *Household Words* publishes Gaskell's "An Accursed Race" and "Half a Life-Time Ago." A group of Gaskell's short stories is published as the book *Lizzie Leigh and Other Stories.*

1857 Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte* Brontë is published. Although it is praised by most, some individuals depicted in the work threaten legal action over the way they are portrayed. Charlotte's first novel and the last to bear her name, *The Professor,* is published, though the book's release is partly obscured by the enormous interest readers show in Gaskell's biography of her. The Matrimonial Causes Act enables women to inherit, own, and bequeath property.

1858 Gaskell's "The Doom of the Griffiths" appears in the American monthly *Harper's New Monthly Magazine.* "My Lady Ludlow" and other short stories are published in *Household Words.*

1859 *Round the Sofa and Other Tales,* a book of short stories, is published. Several short stories appear in *All the Year Round*, Dickens's new weekly magazine. Darwin's On *the Origin of Species* and Dickens's *A Tale of Two* Cities are published.

1860 *Right* at *Last and Other Tales,* a book of short stories, is published.

1861 The American Civil War begins.

1862 "Six Weeks at Heppenheim" is published in the Cornhill Magazine.

1863 "A Dark Night's Work" appears in All the Year *Round. Cousin* Phyllis, a short novel, is serialized in the Cornhill *Magazine,* to be concluded early in 1864. The story's country setting prefigures a more detailed portrait in *Wives and Daughters.* The novel Sylvia's *Lovers,* set in Napoléon's time, is published.

1864 The first installments of *Wives and Daughters* appear in the *Cornhill Magazine.* The novel evokes the pastoral setting of Gaskell's girlhood country home.

1865 As a surprise for her husband's future retirement, Gaskell buys a country house in Hampshire with the proceeds from her writing. Physically exhausted, and yet to complete the final installment of her novel, Gaskell dies suddenly on a visit to the house on November 12. She is buried at Brook Street Chapel in Knutsford.

1866 The serial publication of *Wives and Daughters* ends. In lieu of the novel's last installment, the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*

writes a note that explains how he thinks the author would have completed the book. The novel is released in book form.

1928 In August, Haworth Parsonage opens to the public as the Brontë Parsonage Museum.

INTRODUCTION

The Apology

There is a photographic realism to the opening passages of Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte* Brontë, with its view of the Leeds and Bradford railway running along the deep valley of the Aire, and its double-exposure image capturing Keighley's transformation from an old-fashioned village into a busy manufacturing town. With the gritty aspect of a daguerreotype, the Life pictures "the great worsted factories" and worker cottages poised between Keighley and Brontë's village of Haworth, and describes the air as "dim and lightless with the smoke from all these habitations and places of business" (p. 12). Focusing her lens not on the picturesque details of Brontë's Yorkshire but rather on its industrial aspect, Gaskell situates her subject in a time of technological revolution that is ushering in social and political change. In pointing out that "modes of thinking, the standards of reference on all points of morality, manners, and even politics and religion" (p. 11) occur at a more rapid pace in newly industrialized areas than they do elsewhere in England, Gaskell neatly anticipates the Life's broader agenda concerning changing attitudes toward women's place in the social order.

As we begin the ascent from Keighley to Haworth, "the vegetation becomes poorer; it does not flourish, it merely exists," and by the time we reach the flower beds under the parsonage windows "only the most hardy plants could be made to grow." The garden is encroached upon by the churchyard, "terribly full of upright tombstones," which surrounds the parsonage on all sides but one (pp. 12-14). Suddenly, in the midst of realism we are in metaphor, those tenacious flowers representing Brontë herself, who will lose her struggle to survive in an uncongenial world. The Brontë home is described as a haven of domesticity amid the desolation of the "wild, bleak moors" (p. 13). "Everything about the place tells of the most dainty order, the most exquisite cleanliness"; the very doorsteps are "spotless," Gaskell assures the reader. "Inside and outside of that house cleanliness goes up into its essence, purity," Gaskell testifies (p. 14),

signaling that we are not, after all, in the province of the documentarian, but rather that of the novelist, the hagiographer, and perhaps even the apologist.

Gaskell, a friend of Brontë's and a famous novelist in her own right, undertook the biography project only months after Brontë's death in 1855 at the urging of Brontë's father the Reverend Patrick Brontë. Because Brontë was a celebrity, her death generated a lot of attention, most of it unwelcome to those who knew her personally. Brontë's oldest and closest friend, Ellen Nussey, who was especially troubled by the tabloid stories that were appearing, induced Charlotte's father to commission a definitive account of his daughter's life to counter the sensationalistic reports then circulating in the press. Patrick faced opposition from Brontë's husband, Arthur Bell Nicholls, who did not like how "the public snatched at every gossiping account" of his wife's life, and who wanted to keep her memory private. Patrick, who saw the project as a means of controlling Brontë's literary legacy, prevailed. "No quailing, Mrs. Gaskell!" Patrick directed, "no drawing back!" (The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, letter 257; see "For Further Reading").

Gaskell was herself a member of the hungry public at one time. She wanted desperately to find out who had written the literary sensation Jane Eyre (1847). By the time Shirley (1849) was published, Gaskell believed she had penetrated at least half of the mystery: "Currer Bell [Brontë's pen name] (aha! what will you give me for a secret?) She's a she—that I will tell you" (The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, letter 57). When Gaskell finally did meet Brontë in August 1850 they shared a natural affinity, but in many ways Gaskell came to know Brontë more completely through her research for the Life than she did through their friendship, which was of relatively brief duration. Gaskell and Brontë had the opportunity to meet on only five occasions, but they furthered their acquaintance through a correspondence that evidences a genuine professional and personal connection, although at heart the two women subscribed to different models of female authorship. In addition, as I discuss below, their friendship may have suffered in intimacy from Brontë's strategically conforming to social standards when she thought it would please Gaskell.

The Life is recognized as an enduring work of the nineteenth century, and it is ranked among the greatest biographies of all time. That said, it is

important to remember that Brontë's life was written by a woman who was unsure if she liked Jane Eyre. Gaskell's intent in writing Brontë's life was to make the reader "honour her as a woman, separate from her character as authoress" *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, letter 242). Most readers know that Brontë was a literary sensation in her day, but modern audiences have lost sight of how polarizing her work was. Although she self-effacingly liked to style herself "a plain country parson's daughter" (p. 370), her novels were incendiary. The aesthetic merit of Brontë's fiction was universally acknowledged, but the political subtexts of her novels provoked consternation. Her heroines registered a generalized discontent and a self-interest that was perceived by some as threatening to the accepted social order, which held that women naturally constituted the silent, self-sacrificing moral nucleus of society, the "angel in the house." This ideological construction was coming under scrutiny in the mid-nineteenth century, under the rubric of the "woman question." Advocates of "female emancipation" held that certain civil rights, suffrage among them, should be extended to women on the grounds that they were capable of exercising the same rational faculty as men.

Brontë provoked those on both ends of the political spectrum. Traditionalists deemed her engagement with female desire "coarse," or immodest, and proponents of women's rights, who believed political gains could be achieved only by demonstrating women's rational equality with men, found her passionate heroines unsettling for other reasons. Brontë did not weigh in on the "woman question" in a positive way, but rather protested against current conditions without outlining solutions. Critics have only recently begun to understand Brontë's feminist agenda as psychological in impulse—an impulse to expose the intangible constraints women face as subjects of a patriarchal system. Brontë was very much aware of the institutional nature of women's oppression, and the impact it had not simply on material issues, like economic independence, but on more fundamental yet harder to characterize concerns, such as intellectual and imaginative freedom. "Millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth," Jane Eyre warns her reader (p. 96).

Gaskell was working from a position of ambivalence in her defense of Brontë. She confesses to the reader that she cannot deny "the existence of coarseness here and there in her works," and "only ask[s] those who read them to consider her life,—which has been openly laid bare before them" *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letters 25a, 517). Gaskell is often faulted for attempting to exonerate Brontë by favoring the portrait of "the *friend, the daughter,* the *sister"* over that of the professional author *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 267). Her reasoning for not including a critical discussion of Brontë's novels in the *Life,* as Brontë's father had desired, was that "public opinion had already pronounced her fiat, set her seal" upon them *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 294). Nevertheless, in writing the Life Gaskell confronts her own ambivalence about Brontë's work, and in the process refines her ideas on women's professional engagement generally. The work is animated by that tension, and consequently it has broader implications that transcend its purported defense of one woman.

Gaskell and the "Brontë Myth"

Long before she was commissioned to write Brontë's biography, Gaskell began a process of creating "a drama of her life in my own mind" (The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, letter 266). Gaskell pursued information about her subject with the avidity of a paparazzo. On her first visit to the parsonage, for example, she asked a servant to show her the family graves without Brontë's knowledge *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 166). And yet Gaskell believed she was motivated by the sympathy of a friend. She pitied Brontë from the first, and romanticized her "wild sad life" (The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, letter 242). She jotted down particulars after hearing them directly from Brontë, and recorded the manner in which she revealed the authorship of *Jane* Eyre to her father, the privations she faced at the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, and other more ephemeral and sentimental details that might have otherwise been lost, such as the "shiver" that passed over Brontë when she told Gaskell about bringing the dying Emily a sprig of heather from her beloved moors, and the pathetic spectacle of Emily's dog, Keeper, following her funeral procession. These notes became the basis for the Life, and, accordingly, much of what is now regarded as the stuff of Brontë myth came directly from Brontë.

Brontë on occasion enjoyed playing the “wild little maiden from Haworth” for her new friend, perhaps sensing an eager audience (p. 82). In her first letter to Gaskell, Brontë offers a glimpse of life at Haworth replete with the romantic touches of “ ‘storms of rain’ ... sweeping over the garden and churchyard” and “the moors... hidden in deep fog” (p. 356). Brontë playfully warns Gaskell before her first visit to the parsonage that she will “come out to barbarism, isolation, and liberty,” and she urges her to come when the heather is in bloom, telling her, “I have waited and watched for its purple signal as the forerunner of your coming” (Charlotte Brontë to Gaskell, June 1, 1853; September 1853; in Barker, ed., *The* Brontës: A *Life in Letters*, pp. 374, 376).

The Brontë myth is exemplified by the supernatural animation of the natural world. Gaskell reports hearing Brontë defend the uncanny moment at the end of Jane Eyre, for example, when Jane hears Rochester’s call, borne on the wind from miles away, by insisting that “ ‘it is a true thing; it really happened’ ” (p. 338). Similarly, Brontë explains that she experiences her sisters’ presence in the moors after their deaths: “ ‘There is not a knoll of heather, not a branch of fern, not a young bilberry-leaf, not a fluttering lark or linnet, but reminds me of [Emily]. The distant prospects were Anne’s delight, and when I look round, she is in the blue tints, the pale mists, the waves and shadows of the horizons’ ” (p. 345).

Although Gaskell does not provide critical commentary on the novels, she does provide firsthand accounts of their composition, the most vivid of these being the ritual the sisters adopted of pacing up and down the dining room at night when they were developing their plots and conferring on drafts of their novels, a practice that Gaskell witnessed Brontë continue alone after her sisters had died: “Three sisters had done this,—then two... and now one was left desolate, to listen for echoing steps that never came, —and to hear the wind sobbing at the windows, with an almost articulate sound” (pp. 317-318). The Gothic coloring of this passage is a prime example of Gaskell allowing the imaginative liberty of the novelist to take precedence over the literalism of the biographer. And yet there is an underlying psychological truth that Gaskell captures through pathetic fallacy. “ ‘The great trial,’ ” Brontë explained of her sisters’ loss, to Ellen Nussey, her lifelong friend, “ ‘is when evening closes and night approaches.

At that hour we used to assemble in the dining-room—we used to talk.' " In her sisters' absence, Brontë found herself consumed by their dying moments, remembering " 'how they looked in mortal affliction,' " and thinking of the " 'narrow dark dwellings' " in which they were laid, " 'never more to reappear on earth.' " " 'This nervousness is a horrid phantom,' " Brontë acknowledges (pp. 312-313).

As a novelist, Gaskell understood that there is an emotional truth that is more compelling than bare factual accounting. The Life exists on the border between documentary accuracy and a novelistic verisimilitude that Gaskell believed to be more authentic. To borrow the dichotomy between what is "real" and what is "true" that Brontë develops to express what she does not like about Jane Austen's novels, there is a greater emotional truth to the Life that diminishes, if not excuses, its representational lapses (p. 276). Brontë feels that Austen's unsentimental choice to represent life "without *poetry*, maybe is sensible, real," but she finds it "more real than true" (p. 276). As Gaskell characterizes it, she always tells the truth in the Life, although she might not tell the whole truth: "I came to the resolution of writing truly, if I wrote at all; of withholding nothing, though some things, from their very nature, could not be spoken of so fully as others" (p. 420). Gaskell is less interested in strict reportage than she is in creating a sensibility of heightened romantic coloring that she believes is faithful to Brontë's own mode of self-presentation.

The Life partakes of Brontë's own strategies of self-representation in nuanced ways. In her diary paper for 1829, for example, the teenaged Brontë records a typical evening at home with her sisters, including a memory of her dead sister Maria. " 'Once Papa lent my sister Maria a book. It was an old geography-book; she wrote on its blank leaf, "Papa lent me this book." This book is a hundred and twenty years old; it is at this moment lying before me. While I write this I am in the kitchen of the Parsonage, Haworth; Tabby, the servant, is washing up the breakfast-things, and Anne, my youngest sister (Maria was my eldest), is kneeling on a chair, looking at some cakes which Tabby has been baking for us. Emily is in the parlor, brushing the carpet' " (p. 70). This passage is significant for its "graphic vividness" as Gaskell notes. Maria, the departed sister, is as present as Emily and Anne. She has inscribed herself in the geography book

and in Brontë's consciousness, and she plays an ongoing role in family activities. Gaskell captures this collapse of past into present, this presence in absence in the Life and animates her narrative with a psychological rhythm that she found in Brontë's own personal writing. G. H. Lewes praised the "psychological drama" of the *Life,* asserting that "fiction has nothing more wild, touching, and heart-strengthening to place above it" (Easson, *Elizabeth* Gaskell: The *Critical* Heritage, p. 386).

Gaskell's interest in Brontë was animated as much by her life as by her work: "I have been so interested in what she has written. I don't mean merely in the story and mode of narration, wonderful as that is, but in the glimpses one gets of her, and... of the way in [which] she has suffered" *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 72). Upon meeting Brontë for the first time, Gaskell telegraphed out accounts to all of her acquaintances. "Such a life as Miss B's I never heard of before," she informs one *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 75). "The wonder to me is how she can have kept heart and power alive in her life of desolation," she tells another *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 79). Gaskell has long been charged with manufacturing the myth that Brontë's life was one of "monotony and privation of any one to love," and the Life's main themes of isolation, emotional deprivation, and chronic ill health are now often dismissed by critics as products of Gaskell's sentimentalism, but it seems that Brontë herself participated in the formation of this impression.

When Gaskell began her acquaintance with Brontë in August 1850, it was at a time of bereavement for Brontë, who had lost all three of her siblings to tuberculosis in quick succession, from September 1848 to May 1849. Her grief was exacerbated by her decision to prepare a new edition of her sisters' novels, Emily's Wuthering *Heights* (1847) and Anne's Agnes Grey (1847), to which she planned to append a selection of their poetry. Rereading her sisters' work " 'occasioned a depression of spirits well nigh intolerable,' " Brontë told Nussey in September 1850. Brontë found that her grief intensified, rather than diminished, over time: " 'I am both angry and surprised at myself for not being in better spirits; for not growing accustomed, or at least resigned, to the solitude and isolation of my lot' " (p. 361). She described being "haunted" by recollections of her sisters that

grew “intolerably poignant,” magnified both by her imagination and by her solitude (pp. 361, 371).

During their initial meeting Brontë supplied Gaskell with a concise but thorough account of her life up to that point, rounding off her pathetic description of the recent deaths of her sisters with the prediction that her own “death will be quite lonely; having no friend or relation in the world to nurse her, & her father dreading a sick room above all places” *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, letter 75). Brontë, having been exposed to tuberculosis, understandably feared that her own death might be imminent, and her statement need not be read as purely melodramatic. It does not accurately reflect the objective truth of her situation, however. She had a very close friend, Nussey, and the housekeeper, Tabby, who was more like family than a servant, to care for her. It does reveal a sense of the emotional and intellectual isolation that Brontë felt in no longer being a member of a creative sisterhood. As such, it constitutes an appeal for Gaskell’s understanding and friendship, born of an urge to forge a new literary sisterhood. Brontë emphasizes her personal tragedy and fragility perhaps to offset the incendiary nature of Jane Eyre, whose reputation preceded her, in approaching the more conventionally feminine and socially acceptable Gaskell. Gaskell certainly came away from this meeting with the feeling that Brontë needed her protection, a feeling that is symbolized by her recollection that Brontë’s tiny hands felt like “the soft touch of a bird in the middle of my palm” (p. 77). If the *Life* sentimentalizes Brontë and her suffering, Brontë was complicit in that construction.

“Morbidity”

Brontë’s cast of mind when she met Gaskell was partly the result of recent sorrow and partly an ongoing psychological reality for Brontë, whose letters indicate that she endured a lifelong struggle with depression. Although she is sometimes evasive about its cause, Gaskell confronts the emotional intensity of Brontë’s depression unflinchingly. Her directness caused one penetrating reviewer to observe that the “inconsiderate” reader would regard the Life as “an unhealthy book” because it “discusses sick minds almost without admitting that they are unsound” (Easson, p. 382). Gaskell

wavers between assigning a “constitutional” or physiological cause to Brontë’s depression, and deeming it the product of “this pressure of grief which had crushed all buoyancy of expectation out of her” (p. 95). She cautions the idle critic who would condemn Brontë’s work as “morbid” to remember how death swept her “hearthstone bare of life and love” (p. 297).

Gaskell traces the origin of Brontë’s “hopelessness” to the loss of her mother and her two eldest sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, when she was still a child (p. 95). In retrospectively attributing a depressive affect to Brontë, Gaskell writes: “I can well imagine that the grave serious composure... was no acquisition of later years, but dated from that early age when she found herself in the position of an elder sister to motherless children” (p. 77). Gaskell’s description of Brontë’s mother is animated by the same dual impulse that informs her portrait of Brontë. On the one hand, Maria Branwell is made to bear the burden of conventional feminine respectability that her daughter was accused of lacking; on the other, she is an independent thinker and writer, and her letters are the “ ‘records of a mind whence my own sprang,’ ” as Brontë herself put it (p. 336). In service of the latter, Gaskell provides extracts from Maria Branwell’s letters to the Reverend Patrick Brontë written during their engagement, and refers to a monograph Maria Branwell intended for publication, “The Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns” (p. 40). In addition, when Gaskell enumerates the literary influences upon the young Brontë, listing the canonical authors she found in her father’s library, the biographer also includes the imaginative legacy Brontë inherited from her mother in the form of her collection of romantically sea-stained “Lady’s Magazines” and “Methodist Magazines,” full of superstition and romance, that Brontë (as she noted in a letter) “ ‘read by stealth,’ ” because her father did not approve of them (pp. 97-98, 149).

The Maria Branwell that Gaskell acquaints us with diffidently prepares for matrimony by “learning by heart a ‘pretty little hymn’ of Mr. Brontë’s composing,” and baking her own wedding cake (p. 39). After marriage, Gaskell reports, “Maria Branwell fades out of sight; we have no more direct intercourse with her; we hear of her as Mrs. Brontë, but it is as an invalid, not far from death” (p. 39). With a Gothic flourish, Gaskell compresses years of married life and childbearing into the ominous report that “Mrs.

Brontë was confined to the bed-room from which she never came forth alive" (p. 43).

The fate of Brontë's mother is meant to foreshadow Brontë's own fate after her marriage to Arthur Bell Nicholls, when, as Gaskell sees it, her professional identity became subsumed into her husband's as she performed the endless round of duties incumbent upon a curate's wife at the expense of cultivating her imaginative life. Before commencing the section of the Life that details Brontë's engagement and marriage, Gaskell exhorts the reader once more to consider the "intellectual side of character, before we lose all thought of the authoress in the timid and conscientious woman about to become a wife" (p. 440). According to Victorian social economy, Gaskell warns, the birth of Mrs. Nicholls entails the death of Miss Brontë, but that is a system of accounting that the Life works to redress.

"Coarseness"

Gaskell intended the biography to vindicate Brontë, who had come under personal attack for the "coarseness" of her works. The charge was a general one, indicating that the novels were not sufficiently feminine or delicate either in expression or subject matter. Reviewers objected particularly to Brontë's frank treatment of female desire, but the angry subtexts of her novels, which debunked religious hypocrisy and decried social inequity, also rankled Victorian audiences who found such criticism especially insupportable from the pen of a woman. "Conventionality is not morality," Brontë admonished her critics in her preface to the second edition of Jane Eyre. "Self-righteousness is not religion." One reviewer, Elizabeth Rigby, branded Jane Eyre a "dangerous" book, calling its heroine "the personification of an unregenerate and undisciplined spirit," and condemning the novel's "murmuring against God's appointment" and its "proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man." The review culminates in an ad hominem attack that impugns Brontë's character as a woman. "If we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has, for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex," Rigby pronounced (Allot, ed., *The* Brontës: The *Critical Heritage*, pp. 109, 111).

In the face of vicious public attacks such as this one, Gaskell felt that she had a “grave duty” to protect her friend’s reputation—both literary and personal *(The Letters of* Mrs. Gaskell, letter 245). As part of her recuperative task, Gaskell cannot emphasize enough the strange “otherness” of the Yorkshire people Brontë lived among, maintaining that even an inhabitant of neighboring Lancashire is struck by their “peculiar force of character” (p. 18). “For a right understanding of the life of my dear friend, Charlotte Brontë,” Gaskell explains, “it appears to me more necessary in her case than in most others, that the reader should be made acquainted with the peculiar forms of population and society amidst which her earliest years were passed” (p. 18). Gaskell characterizes Brontë as “one who has led a wild and struggling and isolated life,—seeing few but plain and outspoken Northerns, unskilled in the euphuisms which assist the polite world to skim over the mention of vice” (p. 297).

To some degree Gaskell’s prejudice reflects Brontë’s own, and her defense takes its cue from Brontë’s “Biographical Notice” of her sisters, which prefaced the posthumous edition of Wuthering *Heights and Agnes Grey* that Brontë prepared for her publisher, Smith, Elder and Company in 1850. The great theme of the “Biographical Notice” is of contagion. Brontë describes her sisters as unconscious victims of what they observed, thus finding an external explanation for the disturbing elements of their work. Emily was contaminated not through direct contact with the Haworth locals, but through their lore, which unconsciously shaped her imagination. “In listening to the secret annals of every rude vicinage, the memory is sometimes compelled to receive the impress,” Brontë explains. She maintains that Emily “did not know what she had done” in writing Wuthering *Heights.* Anne “hated her work,” Brontë insists, but “believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail” of the dissolute characters she drew as a warning to others (p. 282). Brontë characterizes both of her sisters as unwilling scribes, whose subjects were forced upon them by the exigencies of life.

Similarly, Gaskell maintains that Brontë was “utterly unconscious” of “what was, by some, deemed coarse in her writings,” and she urges the reader to “remember her strong feeling of the duty of representing life as it really is, not as it ought to be” (p. 425). The offending elements of Jane

Eyre are copied from life, Gaskell explains, while the scenes drawn from Brontë's "own imagination... stand out in exquisite relief from the deep shadows and wayward lines" of the "wild and grotesque" scenes of life she witnessed around her (p. 244).

Gaskell locates the most acute source of moral contagion within the parsonage itself, however, in the shape of Brontë's brother, Branwell, whose struggle with alcoholism and opium addiction resulted in premature death. "Think of her home," Gaskell exhorts the reader who would fault Brontë for want of delicacy, "and the black shadow of remorse lying over one in it, till his very brain was mazed, and his gifts and his life were lost" (p. 245). In Gaskell's estimation Branwell's sins range from denying his sisters' dream of independence—his evident debauchery being the reason they were unable to start a school at the parsonage—to the more strained claim that the "many bitter noiseless tears" Brontë shed on his account weakened her eyesight (p. 219).

The Brontës viewed Branwell as the most promising artist among them. Accordingly, they were prepared to make sacrifices to forward his education. Brontë's letters evidence the pressure she and her sisters felt to relieve their father of the financial burden of their maintenance so that he could support Branwell's attendance at the Royal Academy of Arts. All three sisters went out as governesses, although they were ill suited to the work, which Brontë termed "'slavery' " (p. 115). Gaskell generalizes the plight of the Brontë sisters with a feminist apostrophe: "These are not the first sisters who have laid their lives as a sacrifice before their brother's idolized wish. Would to God they might be the last who met with such a miserable return!" (p. 107). Branwell never entered the Royal Academy; the reason why is unknown. Instead, he cycled through a series of jobs, ending in a position analogous to that of his sisters, as tutor to a prominent local family, the Robinsons of Thorp Green Hall.

Evasions

While at Thorp Green Hall, Branwell allegedly engaged in a sexual relationship with Lydia Robinson, the wife of his employer. No proof has been found, but Branwell's assertions that Robinson was one "whom I

must, till death, call my wife" (Branwell Brontë to Francis Grundy, October 1845; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 2, p. 367) and his dismissal in the summer of 1845 for behavior that his employer characterized as "bad beyond expression" are suggestive (p. 222). If Gaskell melodramatically represents the Brontë sisters as victims of Branwell's profligacy, she is even more extravagant in absolving Branwell from responsibility for the Robinson affair. Gaskell rests most of the blame with Robinson, noting that this "case presents the reverse of the usual features; the man became the victim." In Gaskell's telling Branwell is merely one of a number of "innocent victims, whose premature deaths may, in part, be laid at her door" (p. 223).

Not surprisingly, Robinson, who had remarried and become Lady Scott by the time the Life appeared, threatened Gaskell with a libel suit. All unsold copies of the Life were pulled from the shelves, a revised edition issued, and a public retraction printed in the Times (May 26, 1857). This injured Gaskell's personal credibility and raised questions about the factual accuracy of the Life generally: It begged the question of why Gaskell should place such emphasis on an episode tangential to Brontë's history.

As one contemporary reviewer observed, because the Life was written so soon after Brontë's death and many of those concerned in it were living, the text is fissured by suppressions and evasions that occasion us "to read between the lines" (Easson, p. 381). The Robinson episode is one. Gaskell had to provide a compelling reason for Brontë's aggravated depression at the end of her stay in Brussels and after her return to Haworth in January 1844, which resulted from her unrequited attachment to a married man, Constantin Heger. Heger was Brontë's literature teacher at the school she attended in Brussels, which was run by his wife. Brontë was later employed there as an English teacher. Heger's growing awareness of the intensity of Brontë's feelings caused him to withdraw from her, and her relationship with Mme. Heger, her employer, simmered with so much suppressed hostility that it became too uncomfortable for Brontë to remain. Gaskell provides an earlier, inaccurate date for Branwell's disgrace and freights the episode with excessive narrative energy in order to cover the trace of Brontë's more innocent but, to Gaskell, equally shocking secret.

When Gaskell traveled to Brussels in May 1856 “to have a look at” the Hegers, as part of her research for the biography, Madame Heger refused to meet with her upon finding that she was Brontë’s friend, but Constantin Heger shared with Gaskell, on the condition of confidentiality, a series of obsessive letters Brontë had sent him after she left the school (The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, letter 271a). Although Gaskell was aware of the entire correspondence and may have read it, it was Heger who made the extracts from Brontë’s letters that appear in the Life, giving a sense of their intensity, but notably excising Brontë’s alternately masochistic and angry demands for attention that his silence provoked.

Even before Heger shared his cache of letters with Gaskell, she had her suspicions that he was the model for Paul Emanuel, the love interest in Villette (1853). Brontë’s attachment to Heger has generally been discussed in the language of romantic infatuation (a notable exception is Lyndall Gordon’s treatment in *Charlotte* Brontë: A *Passionate Life*), but her passion is perhaps best understood as a product of the intellectual and imaginative connection she forged with her teacher, who represented a world of letters that Brontë felt exiled from on her return to Haworth. “ ‘I feel as if we were all buried here,’ ” she complained to Nussey after her return, “ ‘I long to travel; to work; to live a life of action’ ” (p. 218).

Gaskell’s treatment of Brontë’s connection to Heger, while evasive on some level, does confront the relationship in aspects important to a critical assessment of Brontë’s development as a writer. Gaskell understood that curiosity seekers would read the *Life* as a key to the novels. As one reviewer put it, “It was natural to wonder whence came this astonishing knowledge of the workings of fiery passion. Did she write from memory—or was she taught by the inspiration of a creative mind?” This reviewer came away with the erroneous impression that “Miss Brontë had, so far as is known to her biographer, never felt anything like love when she wrote Jane Eyre” (Easson, p. 377).

In creating this impression, Gaskell may break her contract with the reader to present the details of the life of the woman, but she provides a professional analysis of the influence Heger had on Brontë’s work. It is for this reason that Gaskell spends so much time discussing Heger’s pedagogical technique. Nor does Gaskell shrink completely from exposing

the emotional content of that bond, as she includes the melancholy letter in which Brontë confesses to Nussey: “I think, however long I live, I shall not forget what the parting with M. Héger cost me” (p. 209).

The full force of Brontë’s impassioned letters to Heger is muted, but Gaskell preserves Brontë’s great desire, to write a novel and dedicate it to her teacher:

“I would write a book and dedicate it to my literature master, to the only master I have ever had—to you, Monsieur! I have told you often in French how much I respect you, how indebted I am to your kindness and your instruction. I would like to say it one time in English. But that cannot be; there’s no use thinking about it. A literary career is closed to me” (p. 219; my translation).

Brontë’s despair registers as anxiety about her ability to make her voice heard as a published author. Heger heard that voice and knew its power, reflecting its worth back to Brontë in his comments on her devoirs (composition exercises). Brontë’s increasing desperation at his silence after she leaves Brussels stemmed perhaps not from desire for his affection, but from a need for his encouragement to write.

Another relationship that receives evasive treatment in the Life is Brontë’s friendship with her publisher, George Smith, which had an exuberant quality unlike any other in Brontë’s adult life. Brontë’s letters to Smith dance with a boisterous, good-humored sarcasm not fully displayed in the Life, as Smith withheld the most playful of them from Gaskell, claiming they were too “purely personal” to be “generally interesting” *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 271a).

In Villette Lucy Snowe describes the penchant that Dr. John, who was inspired by Smith, has for making life exciting: “Of every door which shut in an object worth seeing... he seemed to possess the ‘Open! Sesame.’ ” Similarly, Smith brought to life some of Brontë’s fantasies. He arranged a visit to the Ladies’ Gallery of the House of Commons. He took her to the chapel at St. James’s Palace to see her childhood idol, the Duke of Wellington, at Sunday worship. He initiated a trip to Scotland to visit the home of her favorite novelist, Sir Walter Scott. He introduced Brontë to William Makepeace Thackeray, the contemporary author she most admired.

As a lasting memory, Smith presented Brontë with portraits of her heroes, Wellington and Thackeray, and to complete the fantasy, he commissioned one of Brontë, by George Richmond, a leading portraitist of the day, thus enshrining her among her worthies.

Gaskell discovered evidence in the Brontë-Nussey correspondence, which she suppresses in the Life, of a romantic attachment between Brontë and her publisher. Nussey, who did not approve of Brontë's traveling to Scotland with the unmarried Smith and his sister, an event that Gaskell neatly sidesteps in the Life, asked her to qualify their relationship. Brontë breezily reassures Ellen: "My six or eight years of seniority to say nothing of lack of all pretension to beauty &c. are a perfect safeguard—I should not in the least fear to go with him to China" (Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, June 20, 1850; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 2, p. 419).

Six months later, however, Brontë adopts a slightly darker tone when she concedes that were "there no vast barrier of age, fortune, &c. there is perhaps enough personal regard to make things possible which now are impossible. If men and women married because they like each others' temper, look, conversation, nature and so on ... the chance you allude to might be admitted as a chance—but other reasons regulate matrimony—reasons of convenience, of connection, of money." Brontë is also now reluctant to travel with Smith, who had proposed a trip to Germany. "That hint about the Rhine disturbs me," Brontë tells Nussey, "I am not made of stone—and what is excitement to him—is fever to me" (Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, January 20, 1851; in The Letters of Charlotte Brontë, vol. 2, p. 557).

Commentators make much of the chillingly terse note of congratulation Brontë sent Smith when she received news of his forthcoming marriage: "In great happiness as in great grief, words of sympathy should be few. Accept my mead of congratulation" (Charlotte Brontë to George Smith, December 10, 1853; in The Letters of Charlotte Brontë, vol. 3, p. 213). Brontë's displeasure with Smith may have been compounded by what she perceived to be a professional, not a personal slight. Significantly, she cools her relationship with William Smith Williams, the firm's literary adviser, at this time as well. "Do not trouble yourself to select or send any more books. These courtesies must cease one day," she writes, "and I would rather give

them up than wear them out" (Charlotte Brontë to William Smith Williams, December 6, 1853; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 3, p. 212). She had expected no less than £700 pounds for *Villette,* and Smith offered only £500, the same sum he had paid for *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley,* respectively. To place this in context, Smith paid Gaskell £1,000 for the *Life.* It was on the basis of Jane *Eyre's* success that Smith's reputation grew and that the firm attracted other high-profile clients, Thackeray among them. A growing sense of professional dissatisfaction may have prompted Brontë to withdraw from amicable relations with the men of Smith, Elder and Company. Brontë's retreat also coincides with her decision to marry, suggesting perhaps that she saw a new vocation becoming evident.

Courtship and Marriage

Gaskell prefaces her discussion of Brontë's courtship and marriage with a caveat. "As I draw nearer to the years so recently closed, it becomes impossible for me to write with the same fulness of detail as I have hitherto," Gaskell explains, signaling that she will offer a version of the truth, but not the whole truth (p. 440). Gaskell keeps to the letter of her law in portraying the tortuous history of Brontë's courtship with Nicholls by citing Patrick's opposition to the match as its only impediment, and not registering any of Brontë's own ambivalence. Brontë feared that her future husband's views on religious and social issues might prove too narrow to suit her, and she worried that he would be unsympathetic to her literary concerns. "My own objections arise from a sense of incongruity and uncongeniality in feelings, tastes—principles," Brontë confessed to Nussey (Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, December 18, 1852; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 3, p. 95). Gaskell represents Brontë's initial refusal of Nicholls as a duty to a father who appears at once tyrannical and dependent. Gaskell observes how "quietly and modestly" Brontë, "on whom such hard judgments had been passed by ignorant reviewers," received Nicholls's "vehement, passionate declaration of love," and how "unselfishly" she refused it in deference to her father's wishes (p. 421).

Gaskell attempts to gloss over Patrick's actual objections to the match, that Nicholls was socially beneath his daughter and his income too modest,

by saying that he “disapproved of marriages” generally. Brontë’s letters say otherwise, however. Patrick did encourage James Taylor’s suit. Taylor, who was a manager of Smith, Elder and Company, is not named as a correspondent throughout the Life, although Gaskell quotes liberally from letters Brontë wrote to him both before and after rejecting him. Gaskell doubtless intended to protect Brontë from the charge that she encouraged a proposal that she did not accept. By including mention of Taylor’s proposal as well as those from two other suitors that Brontë received before Nicholls presented himself, Gaskell makes clear that she remained single by choice, not fate, scorning to marry simply to escape “the stigma of an old maid,” as she told her first suitor, Henry Nussey, Ellen’s brother (Charlotte Brontë to Henry Nussey, March 5, 1839; in The Letters of Charlotte Brontë, vol. 1, pp. 185-186). Brontë’s three previous rejections also give a consequent weight to her decision to accept Nicholls.

Nicholls’s persistence assured Brontë of the intensity of his passion, something she feared he lacked, and his promise not to seek an independent living but to remain at Haworth as Patrick’s curate relieved her father’s fear of separation. “By degrees Mr. Brontë became reconciled to the idea of his daughter’s marriage,” Gaskell reports, suppressing the fact that she may have directly contributed to this change of heart by secretly arranging for Nicholls to receive a pension that increased his income, something that Brontë never discovered (p. 440; The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, letters 168, 195).

Brontë’s fears about compatibility proved to be no more than customary premarital jitters. “My husband is not a poet or a poetical man—and one of my grand doubts before marriage was about ‘congenial tastes’ and so on,” Brontë wrote during her honeymoon, having realized that Nicholls offered a connection that was “a thousand times better than any half sort of psuedo sympathy” (Charlotte Brontë to Catherine Winkworth, July 27, 1854; in The Letters of Charlotte Brontë, vol. 3, pp. 279-280). If Brontë was personally happy in her choice, she was equally happy to have provided assistance and companionship for her father through her marriage: “ ‘Papa has taken no duty since we returned; and each time I see Mr. Nicholls put on gown or surplice, I feel comforted to think that this marriage secured papa good aid in his old age’ ” (p. 448). Nicholls kept his promise “to

comfort and sustain [Patrick's] declining years," (p. 444) living with him until his death in 1861.

Gaskell loads Brontë's marriage with recuperative possibility and expresses the hope that "the slight astringencies of her character... would turn to full ripe sweetness in that calm sunshine of domestic peace" (p. 447). Brontë saw things similarly, if more pragmatically and with less certainty. "If true domestic happiness replace Fame—the exchange <is> will indeed be for the better," she told her former teacher, Margaret Wooler, shortly after marriage. Significantly, Brontë struck through the more certain, present-tense verb, "is," and replaced it with the conditional "will be" (Charlotte Brontë to M. Wooler, September 19, 1854; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 3, p. 290). Gaskell edited out that sentence, although she included the rest of the letter in the Life. Brontë goes on to explain that her curate husband " 'often finds a little work for his wife to do, and I hope she is not sorry to help him.' " Brontë's coy, but jarring, use of the third person to distinguish the role she plays as "wife" from her true self, casts doubt on the sincerity of her complacency when she adds, " 'I believe it is not bad for me that his bent should be so wholly towards matters of real life and active usefulness; so little inclined to the literary and contemplative' " (p. 449). Nicholls and Brontë did seem on the path to a truly companionate marriage. Significantly, Brontë read aloud to him an unfinished novel she was working on, a practice she shared with no one but her sisters. "As to my husband," she wrote to a friend just before her death, "my heart is knit to him" (Charlotte Brontë to Amelia Taylor, February 1855; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 3, p. 327).

Patrick Brontë

The portrait of Brontë's father that emerges from the Life is one of public benefactor and domestic tyrant. While Gaskell extols Patrick's "diligent" attention to his parishioners in his role as Haworth's perpetual curate, his tolerance of nonconformists, and a freedom from dogmatism that enables him "fearlessly" to take "whatever side in local or national politics appeared to him right," it is hard to view these laudable qualities through the dense fog of anecdote cataloguing his "volcanic wrath." Most of these details,

such as his burning his children's colored boots and slashing his wife's silk gown because he thought them too "gay and luxurious," were provided by an unreliable source and omitted, at Patrick's request, in the revised third edition of the Life. Gaskell attributes Patrick's peculiarities, such as his alleged propensity to work off his rage by "firing pistols out of the back-door in rapid succession," to his "passionate, Irish nature," and insists that she mentions these instances of "eccentricity in the father" not to "judge them," but because they are necessary "for a right understanding of the life of his daughter" (pp. 45, 46).

But the Life is internally inconsistent on Patrick's domestic character. His description in a letter of intervening as " 'arbitrator' " when the " 'little plays' " his children invented erupted into impassioned political debate (p. 49), his initiation of a game in which he offered his children masks to encourage them to speak their opinions more " 'boldly,' " and his own testimony that he discussed "the leading topics of the day" with his young daughter Maria "with as much freedom and pleasure as with any grown-up person" work to undermine Gaskell's claim that Patrick was a "considerably restrained" father who was not "naturally fond of children" (pp. 37, 41).

Gaskell paints Patrick as a misanthropic and unsympathetic father who neglected his growing daughters' health, education, and social needs. Patrick did see to it that all of his daughters were offered formal education in a period when it was not considered a right or a necessity. Furthermore, his unconventional approach to their education, whether through benign neglect, as Gaskell argues, or from a more active principle, worked to draw out Brontë's talent. She was allowed unfettered access to Patrick's library, and she was not barred from reading authors not considered appropriate fare for young women at the time. Among these was Lord Byron, whose version of Romanticism influenced Brontë greatly. The one area in which Patrick did exercise censorship was in burning his wife's collection of the "Lady's Magazines," because they contained "foolish love stories" that he did not like his daughters to read (Charlotte Brontë to Hartley Coleridge, December 10, 1840; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 1, p. 240).

Gaskell's antipathy for Patrick may be explained in part by her first meeting him at a time of crisis in the Brontë household, when father and

daughter had reached an uneasy stalemate after Patrick forbade Brontë to accept Nicholls's offer of marriage. "He was very polite and agreeable to me," Gaskell commented on Patrick's demeanor during her visit, adding that she was nevertheless, "sadly afraid of him in my inmost soul; for I caught a glance of his stern eyes over his spectacles at Miss Brontë once or twice which made me know my man" (The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, letter 166). Both Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor, whose friendship with Brontë dated back to their days together at Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, thought Patrick overly controlling.

Patrick did not seem to sense Gaskell's unease. He encouraged her friendship with his daughter, writing shortly after Gaskell's visit: "I think that you and my daughter are congenial spirits, and that a little intercourse between you might under the strange vicissitudes and frequent trials of this mortal life... be productive of pleasure and profit to you both" (Patrick Brontë to Gaskell, September 15, 1853; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 3, p. 193).

Sister Authors?

As two of the most famous writers of their day, Brontë and Gaskell shared an exceptional bond. Although Brontë's fame now eclipses Gaskell's, in their day Gaskell was perhaps the more generally admired of the two. Modern reversal of Victorian valuation may have more to do with narrative mode than choice of subject matter; Gaskell's sentimentalism fell out of favor, while Brontë's psychological realism finds greater and greater resonance with successive generations of readers. But this imbalance is now being redressed, as critics take a new interest in the social significance of Gaskell's work. Patrick Brontë praised the biography as "every way worthy of what one Great Woman, should have written of Another" (Patrick Brontë to Gaskell, July 30, 1857; quoted in Barker, *The* Brontës, p. 808). Similarly, a reviewer remarked that the *Life* benefited from insights that could only have been provided by "a kindred spirit, a fellow-worker in the same vineyard, a sister genius, and a loving-friend" (Easson, p. 388).

Although it is a quaint notion to picture Brontë and Gaskell as toilers in the same "vineyard," the true extent of their literary sisterhood is debatable.

Gaskell was a noted “condition of England” novelist, whose fiction was a vehicle for education and reform, although her work is more nuanced than this rubric suggests, and she moved away from this model in later novels, as in the posthumously published Wives and Daughters (1866). She gives voice to the concerns of disenfranchised workers in her industrial novel, *Mary Barton* (1848), and, in her most controversial novel, Ruth (1853), she depicts the confluence of social and economic forces that lead to the seduction of a young woman. Gaskell allows Ruth to survive her shame and lead a useful life for a time, only to impose a penitential ending in which Ruth dies in an act of self-sacrifice. While aspects of Gaskell’s work may seem overly sentimental to today’s readers, she leverages emotion to build the reader sympathy necessary to open up settled moral questions to a new angle of vision. How do we define criminality? Is stealing a loaf of bread to feed a starving child more immoral than legalized institutional thefts such as the exploitation of labor and the derogation of personal dignity? Gaskell asserts in the preface to Mary Barton that she is interested in exploring “the state of feeling” on topical issues, not in debating economic facts and figures. She does so, in part, to stay within the proscribed sphere of her sex, but also because she wants her reader to learn to sympathize, not to theorize.

Gaskell viewed fiction writing as a natural extension of the missionary or “rescue work” that she performed as the wife of a Unitarian minister in the great manufacturing hub of Manchester. (For details on Gaskell’s missionary work, see Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell:A Habit* of Stories.) This is not to say that her books were traditionalist; Ruth was burned (The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, letter 154). But she does at times undercut the full radical potential of the sympathy she awakens by imposing a recuperative ending. Brontë objected to Ruth’s death, for example, on the grounds that it diminishes the novel’s efficacy as an agent of change: “ ‘Such a book may restore hope and energy to many who thought they had forfeited their right to both.... Yet hear my protest! Why should she die? Why are we to shut up the book weeping?’ ” (p. 406). Significantly, Brontë encases her political critique in an affective one, perhaps aware that she was treading on sensitive ground.

There is a similar hesitancy, unlike Brontë's forthright and assured voice when addressing critical questions in letters to Williams, for example, in the rhetorical question she puts to Gaskell about the pressure she might encounter to conform to proscribed standards and beliefs in her work: "Do you, who have so many friends,—so large a circle of acquaintance,—find it easy, when you sit down to write, to isolate yourself from all those ties, and their sweet associations, so as to be your *own woman,* uninfluenced or swayed by the consciousness of how your work might affect other minds.... Does no luminous cloud ever come between you and the severe Truth, as you know it in your own secret and clear-seeing soul? Don't answer this question; it is not intended to be answered" (pp. 433-434). Although Brontë is careful to bestow the ladylike designation "sweet associations," upon them, she is prodding Gaskell to reassess the ties that may bind her to a conventionalism she might not adhere to in her "secret and clear-seeing soul." Brontë pushes Gaskell to confront her own limitations as a writer here, and urges her toward a greater degree of verisimilitude.

Brontë's social impulse is harder to characterize than is Gaskell's, which is what may account for Gaskell's ambivalence about her work. (Critics have begun to consider the feminist implications of Brontë's novels relatively recently.) "I often wish to say something about the 'condition of women' question," she told Williams, "but it is one respecting which so much 'cant' has been talked, that one feels a sort of repugnance to approach it. It is true enough that the present market for female labour is quite overstocked—but where or how could another be opened?" (Charlotte Brontë to William Smith Williams, May 12, 1848; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 2, p. 66).

Jane Eyre registers the restlessness and dissatisfaction a governess feels with her lot in life: "Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do" (p. 96). Responding to the charge that the heroine of Villette " 'may be thought morbid and weak,' " Brontë retorts, " 'anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid' " (p. 416). Brontë does not isolate Lucy Snowe as a case study of neurosis; rather, she puts her "morbidity" in perspective, pointing to its

cultural causes, above all the limited range for the exercise of her intellect in dignified employment.

Teaching was virtually the only respectable profession open to women of Brontë's social standing, and teachers' salaries were generally not sufficient to render them truly independent. Gaskell does not shy from registering Brontë's disdain for that kind of work: " 'I am no teacher; to look on me in that light is to mistake me. To teach is not my vocation. What I am, it is useless to say. Those whom it concerns feel and find it out,' " Brontë told Nussey (p. 326). As a teacher at Miss Wooler's school, Brontë chafed against the uniformity of her employment: " 'Nothing but teach, teach, teach, from morning to night' " (p. 115). Gaskell qualifies Brontë's time there as "tedious and monotonous," but in the journal Brontë kept at this time she describes it more pejoratively, as a term of imprisonment: " 'Must I from day to day sit chained to this chair prisoned within these four bare-walls, while these glorious summer suns are burning in heaven & the year is revolving in its richest glow & declaring at the close of every summer day the time I am losing will never come again?' " (Barker, *The* Brontës: A *Life in Letters*, p. 39). While the Life does register the depth of Brontë's anguish during this period, it casts her professional identity crisis of 1835-1837 as a religious crisis, relying as it does on Brontë's letters to Nussey in which she uses the cryptic language of transgression and of longing for " 'reconciliation to God' " to describe her angst (p. 113). But the journal entries from the same period tell a different story—one of frustrated genius—of longing to "write gloriously" but being condemned to teach "Dolts" and "asses" *(The* Brontës, pp. 39-40).

The Brontë-Nussey Correspondence

Some argue that the Life suffers from Gaskell's heavy reliance on Brontë's letters to Nussey, who is often characterized as a provincial and conventional person with whom Brontë did not discuss her literary concerns. This view of Nussey is based in part on a letter in which Brontë seems to slight her when she describes her as "no more than a conscientious, observant, calm, well-bred Yorkshire girl" who is "without romance," and whose clumsy attempts to read poetry aloud make Brontë

want to stop her ears. The letter contains the passionate avowal, however, that “no new friend, however lofty and profound in intellect—not Miss Martineau herself—could be to me what Ellen is” (Charlotte Brontë to William Smith Williams, January 3, 1850; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 2, p. 323).

In the early days of their friendship, Brontë trusted a mutual friend, the independent and unconventional Mary Taylor, to understand her better than Nussey did. This correspondence, sadly, is lost. Taylor burned all of Brontë’s letters but the one in which she describes her first visit to her publishers, Smith, Elder and Company. In an 1836 letter to Nussey, Brontë told her, “I sat down and wrote to you such a note as I ought to have written to none but M. Taylor who is nearly as mad as myself, when I glanced it over it occurred to me that Ellen’s calm eye would look at this with scorn, so I determined to concoct some production more fit for the inspection of common-sense” (Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, September 26, 1836; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 1, p. 151). If Brontë’s personification of Nussey as “common-sense,” seems dismissive, her revelation that she has written two letters entails an appeal, an embedded question: Would Ellen scorn such a production? Brontë indirectly seeks Nussey’s permission for greater freedom of expression in their correspondence.

The desired intimacy was achieved during Brontë’s tenure at Miss Wooler’s school. “ ‘Don’t deceive yourself by imagining I have a bit of real goodness about me,’ ” a self-loathing Brontë enigmatically warned Nussey. “ ‘If you knew my thoughts, the dreams that absorb me, and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up ... you would pity and I dare say despise me’ ” (p. 112). The source of Brontë’s anxiety is the fear, which she veils, that her compulsive engagement with the imaginary world of the juvenile Glasstown and Angria Saga that she and Branwell coauthored was socially unacceptable for a young woman. Brontë’s depression stems not only from the fact that she feels forced to teach at the expense of writing, but also from a corollary effort to abandon the lurid fantasy writing of her youth in favor of realist fiction. Brontë expresses herself in letters from this period with a vehemence that might have repelled a truly conventional person, and emerges from this dark spell calling Nussey “ ‘her comforter’ ” (p. 127).

As their friendship deepened, Brontë was more authentic and unguarded with Nussey than with any other correspondent. “ ‘I write to you freely,’ ” Brontë explained in the difficult summer following her sisters’ deaths, “ ‘because I believe you will hear me with moderation’ ” (p. 314). While it is true that letters to Nussey are evidence that Brontë “was one to study the path of duty well,” as Gaskell says *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, letter 267), we can also understand why Brontë’s husband deemed her letters to this friend “lucifer matches” (Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, October 24, 1854; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 3, p. 295). Nicholls understood that Brontë’s publicity would make these expressive letters of interest to a wider audience, and consequently made it a condition of their correspondence that Nussey burn them. The purportedly conventional Nussey, notably, did not comply with Nicholls’s request. This correspondence, which captures Brontë under the stress of self-development, provides a natural character arc for Brontë as heroine of Gaskell’s novelistic *Life.*

“The Woman Question”

Brontë did prefer teaching in a school to submitting to the “ ‘slavery’ ” of being a governess in a private family (p. 115). Gaskell captures with vivid intensity the painful alienation Brontë felt during her years as a governess. The liminal position of governesses, who were suspended between classes, being neither equal to their masters nor truly servants, had the effect of negating both the value and the difficulty of their work. Brontë’s remarks that she would rather be a “ ‘housemaid’ ” than a governess, and that she “ ‘could like to work in a mill,’ ” may show signs of class insensitivity, but her hyperbole constitutes a critique of the value structure of genteel employment (pp. 134, 138). To make employment suitable for young ladies, the issue of labor had to be politely elided, the compensation nominal.

As much as she detested working at Margaret Wooler’s school, Brontë looked up to Wooler because she managed to contrive an independent life by running a school. “ ‘There is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman, who makes her way through life,’ ” Brontë told her (p. 232). When Williams asked Brontë’s advice about educating his

daughters, Brontë urged him to “give their existence some object” in case they did not marry. “An education secured is an advantage gained—a priceless advantage. Come what may—it is a step towards independency—and one great curse of a single female life is its dependency,” she cautions:

Lonely as I am, how should I be if Providence had never given me courage to adopt a career.... How should I be with youth past, sisters lost, a resident in a moorland parish where there is not a single educated family? in that case I should have no world at all: the raven, weary of surveying the deluge, and without an ark to return to, would be my type. As it is, something like a hope sustains me still.... I wish every woman in England had also a hope and a motive. Alas! there are many old maids who have neither (Charlotte Brontë to William Smith Williams, July 3, 1849; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 2, p. 227).

When Brontë speaks generally about the lot of single women, she names economic dependency as their “great curse,” but in atomizing her own condition, she places emphasis not on her material condition, but on her intellectual and psychological needs.

Gaskell, too, was sensitive to “the trials of many single women, who waken up some morning to the sudden feeling of the purposelessness (is there such a word) of their lives.” “I think I see everyday how women, deprived of their natural duties as wives & mothers, must look out for other duties if they wish to be at peace,” Gaskell explains to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, letter 72). Gaskell’s formulation of the problem, that women are appointed by natural order to perform specific duties, differs only marginally from Brontë’s more practical view that a career would be a superfluity for a married woman: “When a woman has a little family to rear and educate and a household to conduct, her hands are full, her vocation is evident—when her destiny isolates her—I suppose she must do what she can—live as she can” (Charlotte Brontë to William Smith Williams, May 12, 1848; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 2, p. 66).

Gaskell refines her position in a letter to her friend Eliza Fox, an artist. “One thing is clear, Women, must give up living an artist’s life, if home duties are to be paramount. It is different with men, whose home duties are

so small a part of their life," Gaskell muses, coming to the conclusion that "assuredly a blending of the two is desirable. (Home duties and the development of the Individual I mean), which you will say it takes no Solomon to tell you but the difficulty is where and when to make one set of duties subserve and give place to the other" *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 68). Gaskell's awkward answer in the Life is to divide Brontë's existence into "two parallel currents—her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Brontë, the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each character—not opposing each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled" (p. 272). While Gaskell's ambivalence about female duty certainly registers here, the fact that she labels the currents "parallel" suggests that she saw the division not as a subordination of one role to the other, but rather as an uneasy coexistence of the two. In addition, Gaskell's careful delineation between Brontë's public and private personae has the effect of preserving her professionalism. Thackeray angered Brontë by referring to her publicly as "Jane Eyre," a conflation that she felt effaced her artistry. She was not Jane Eyre; she had created Jane Eyre.

Gaskell conducted her own literary career with uncompromising professionalism, famously locking horns with Charles Dickens over creative differences when she wrote for his periodical *Household Words.* But her ambivalence about Brontë's work persisted well into their friendship. "The difference between Miss Brontë and me," Gaskell explained to a friend, "is that she puts all her naughtiness into her books, and I put all my goodness. I am sure she works off a great deal that is morbid into her writing, and out of her life; and my books are so far better than I am that I often feel... as if I were a hypocrite" *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 154). Both Brontë and Gaskell saw their work as therapeutic. Gaskell wrote her first novel, *Mary Barton,* in an attempt to exorcize her grief over the death of an infant son. Brontë found relief from loneliness in the life of her imagination after the deaths of her sisters. " 'The faculty of imagination lifted me when I was sinking... its active exercise has kept my head above water since; its results cheer me now, for I feel they have enabled me to give pleasure to others. I am thankful to God, who gave me the faculty; and it is for me a part of my religion to defend this gift, and to profit by its possession,' " Brontë told Williams (p. 320).

Where Brontë sees writing as a form of solace and pleasure, Gaskell loads it with the corrective function of “normalizing” the self by working out unhealthy energy. Women’s participation in the “hidden world of art” is beneficial if it “keeps them from being morbid,” Gaskell believes, but if “Self is to be the end of exertions, those exertions are unholy, there is not doubt of that—and that is part of the danger in cultivating the Individual Life” *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, letter 68).

Gaskell feared that Brontë’s desire to write and to be heard was a self-indulgence that was abnormal and not strictly womanly. As Gaskell described it in a letter to a friend, Brontë had a “ ‘desire (almost amounting to illness) of expressing herself in some way’ ” (p. 436).

So desirous was Brontë of recognition, that she sent samples of her work to Robert Southey, England’s poet laureate, just before her twenty-first birthday. Southey recognized her talent, but discouraged her from pursuing a literary career, saying that “ ‘literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be,’ ” and promising that the woman who is “ ‘engaged in her proper duties’ ” . . . is “ ‘less eager for celebrity’ ” (p. 123). Brontë’s response seemed a model of contrition, and it pleased Southey as such, but it was carefully veiled rebellion (p. 125). Her letter fairly drips with sarcasm in the guise of naive acceptance: “ ‘You only warn me against the folly of neglecting real duties, for the sake of imaginative pleasures... You kindly allow me to write... provided I leave undone nothing which I ought to do ... I am afraid, sir, you think me very foolish. I know the first letter I wrote to you was all senseless trash from beginning to end; but I am not altogether the idle dreaming being it would seem to denote’ ” (p. 124).

Brontë’s original letter is not extant, but judging from her response it sounds as if she first approached Southey in an inauthentic voice that she here disowns. Brontë smartly assures Southey that she knows and does her duty She explains that as the daughter of a clergyman of limited income she has been forced out into the world as governess. “ ‘In that capacity,’ ” Brontë affirms, “ ‘I find enough to occupy my thoughts all day long, and my head and hands too, without having a moment’s time for one dream’ ” (p. 124).

Brontë's avowal of domestic responsibility appeased Southey and was reassuring to Gaskell as well. Throughout the Life Gaskell anxiously repeats that Brontë did not cultivate the literary arts at the expense of the domestic ones. "Never was the claim of any duty, never was the call of another for help, neglected for an instant," Gaskell protests (p. 246). She often counterweights discussions of Brontë's professional engagement with examples of her fulfilling her duty to her father and other dependents. " 'The right path is that which necessitates the greatest sacrifice of self-interest—which implies the greatest good to others,' " Brontë counseled Nussey when she was torn between staying at home to care for her aging mother and going out to " 'governess drudgery,' " as Brontë called it. " 'I recommend you to do what I am trying to do myself,' " Brontë adds, showing signs of a character in conflict, a struggle to be dutiful (p. 237).

In Gaskell's discussion of *Jane Eyre's* composition history, she relates the anecdote of Brontë's "breaking off in the full flow of interest and inspiration in her writing," to "carefully cut out the specks in the potatoes" that had been missed by the aging and nearly blind Tabby (p. 246). Rather than diminishing Brontë's stature as a professional, as some contend, these details make the reader appreciate the divided nature of her labor. Examples such as this may have won Brontë a belated place in the hearts of Victorians who saw in her sacrifice "the martyr's pang, and the saint's victory," but they impress today's reader instead with the constraints under which she produced enduring literary classics (Easson, p. 381).

Gaskell, who had to meet the needs of four growing daughters, the manifold responsibilities of a minister's wife, and the demands of her rescue work, complained to her friend Charles Eliot Norton of the household mundanities that harassed her away from writing:

If I had a library like yours, all undisturbed for hours, how I could write! ... But you see everybody comes to me perpetually. Now in this hour since breakfast I have had to decide on the following variety of important questions. Boiled beef—how long to boil? What perennials will do in Manchester smoke, & what colours our garden wants? Length of skirt for a gown? Salary of a nursery governess, & certain stipulations for amount of time to be left to herself *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, letter 384).

Although she couches it in the neutral wish for a private library, Gaskell's point is that if she were a man, and thereby liberated from the domestic responsibilities that divide her focus, she would be a better, or at least a more prolific, writer.

The Brontë—Gaskell correspondence evidences an ongoing conversation about women's changing role. " 'Men begin to regard the position of woman in another light than they used to do,' " Brontë observed in her first letter to Gaskell. " 'They say... that the amelioration of our condition depends on ourselves. Certainly there are evils which our own efforts will best reach; but as certainly there are other evils—deep-rooted in the foundations of the social system—which no efforts of ours can touch' " (pp. 356—357). A letter written a month later suggests that the friends shared what was, for their day, quite a progressive position on women's labor: " 'Why are you and I to think (perhaps I should rather say to feel) so exactly alike on some points that there can be no discussion between us?' " Brontë wrote to her future biographer. " 'Your words on this paper express my thoughts.' " The subject under discussion was Harriet Taylor's article "The Enfranchisement of Women," which appeared in the Westminster Review in 1851 and was attributed to J. S. Mill. Brontë opposed many aspects of it, but she embraced its treatment of the question of women's employment, " 'especially' " the contention " 'that if there be a natural unfitness in women for men's employment, there is no need to make laws on the subject; leave all careers open; let them try' " (p. 391). Oddly, although Brontë's letter suggests that Gaskell expressed her absolute agreement (in a letter that is now lost), in a letter to J. S. Mill, written after the publication of the Life, Gaskell denies having read the article at all *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, letter 435).

Whatever general beliefs Gaskell held about the fitness of women's employment, she justifies Brontë's literary career by characterizing it as a duty, an "extra responsibility implied by the very fact of her possessing such talents" (p. 273). In so doing, Gaskell uses conventional terminology about women's place to a radical end. If entering into public discourse can be termed a feminine duty, then it is acceptable, even incumbent upon women to exercise their talents in this arena. Gaskell's model is an extension of the Victorian ideology of the "angel in the house," which held

that women were to provide a global moral compass by exerting domestic influence. Similarly, to excuse women's foray into print, Gaskell believes their work should be a vehicle for social improvement.

As Gaskell explains of Brontë, "She must not hide her gift in a napkin; it was meant for the use and service of others" (p. 273). It is easier, however, to make a case for the moral utility of Gaskell's social problem novels than it is for Brontë's less practically interventionist engagement with issues of the day. Brontë had a somewhat uneasy relation to her fiction in this regard. She writes to her publisher, George Smith: " 'You will see that "Villette" touches on no matter of public interest. I cannot write books handling the topics of the day; it is of no use trying. Nor can I write a book for its moral' " (p. 414). Brontë's letter to Smith is unapologetic, but she assumes an air of self-chastisement when she writes to Gaskell on the same subject: " '*Villette* has no right to push itself before *Ruth.* There is a goodness, a philanthropic purpose, a social use in the latter, to which the former cannot for an instant pretend' " (p. 422). The difference in tone of the two letters suggests, as does Brontë's cautious criticism of Ruth's tragic ending, that Brontë might have muted the force of some of her opinions in order not to alienate her new friend.

Villette did provoke Harriet Martineau, another new literary acquaintance to whom Brontë looked for approbation. In her review of the novel in the *Daily News*, Martineau faulted Brontë for her "incessant... tendency to describe the need of being loved," and for allowing her heroine to "entertain a double love," which was tantamount to an accusation of immodesty. Ironically, this criticism has much in common with the accusations in the Rigby review of Jane Eyre, although Martineau was coming at the issue from a different perspective. Martineau, a feminist, feared that the novel's unapologetic exhibition of female desire would prove counterproductive to the political and social gains that were taking place based on an emerging sense of women's rational equality with men. "There are substantial, heartfelt interests for women of all ages, and under ordinary circumstances, quite apart from love," Martineau insisted, "and to the absence of it may be attributed some of the criticism which the book will meet with from readers who are no prudes, but whose reason and taste will reject the assumption that events and characters are to be regarded through the medium of one

passion only" (Allot, p. 173). Brontë's view, that the personal is political, would not seem a plausible feminist platform for another hundred years.

Significantly, Gaskell follows Brontë's apology for *Villette's* lack of moral utility, with the promise that "had she lived," she would have started to produce more socially responsible work. On her final trip to London, Gaskell explains, Brontë was free to make her own itinerary and she elected to see " 'the real in preference to the decorative side of life,' " visiting Newgate and Pentonville prisons, Bethlehem Hospital for the insane, and the Foundling Hospital. "All that she saw during this last visit to London impressed her deeply," Gaskell reports, "so much so as to render her incapable of the immediate expression of her feelings." "If she had lived," Gaskell predicts, "her deep heart would sooner or later have spoken out" (p. 423).

Conclusions

Gaskell came to know Brontë more completely through her research for the *Life* than she did through their friendship, which was of relatively brief duration and, as stated above, may have suffered in intimacy from Brontë's strategically conforming to social standards when she thought it would please Gaskell. What impressed Gaskell most in reading Brontë's personal correspondence was the degree to which her voice and "spirit" varied "according to the correspondent whom she was addressing" *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, letter 274). Bronte did not adopt the irreverent, rakish swagger in her letters to Gaskell that she did in those to Branwell, nor did she display the astringent sarcasm (which Gaskell quietly censored without a telltale ellipsis in the Life) that animates her anonymous letter to the critic and minor poet Hartley Coleridge, who had failed to appreciate her work. Gaskell also saw the "wild weird" writing of the juvenile period that she felt bordered on "delirium" (p. 72). Gaskell allows a "fac simile" of a page of one of these miniscule manuscripts to stand in for proper analysis, perhaps deterred by their balder articulation of eroticism and participation in the supernatural than is found in the mature works, and by the irreverent cynicism of Brontë's male narrators of the Angrian period (p. 73).

Gaskell saw her primary role as that of elegist, celebrating not the work, but the life of her "dear friend, Charlotte Brontë" (p. 18). To that end, Gaskell employs her full arsenal of literary technique. Pathos is the currency of the *Life* because reader empathy is integral to Gaskell's vindication project. Gaskell's repetition of key themes and her layering of the voices of eyewitnesses, family, and friends lend the Life an authority and intensity that no other biographical study of Brontë shares. With these "viva voce glimpses into her [Brontë's] daily life" Gaskell creates a circle of acquaintances around Brontë of which the reader feels a part *(The Letters of Mrs.* Gaskell, letter 154). Gaskell employs one of Brontë's own favored devices, direct reader address, to create a conspiratorial feeling between author and audience. (Brontë often used it for the opposite effect, to distance the reader or to anticipate reader hostility.) Gaskell does not address her memoir to any general audience, but rather to those who "know how to listen" (p. 267). She turns from "the critical, unsympathetic public," to appeal to a "larger and more solemn public, who know how to look with tender humility at faults and errors; how to admire generously extraordinary genius." Gaskell addresses posterity here, a public she envisions as both broader and more broadminded than Victorian society. "To that public," Gaskell declares in the Life's concluding line, "I commit the memory of Charlotte Brontë," entrusting the reader with a heavy charge (p. 454).

While the *Life* seems transparent, it is not. Gaskell is skilled at manipulating point of view. Although she seems to give the reader un-mediated access to Brontë's voice through personal correspondence, Gaskell carefully culled and edited that correspondence; she staged Brontë's voice, and in so doing she stripped that voice of some of its power and pique. Despite Gaskell's self-effacing comment that "the letters speak for themselves, to those who know how to listen, far better than I can interpret their meaning into my poorer and weaker words," the very act of selection is an act of interpretation (p. 267).

But Brontë's words do often speak for themselves more loudly than Gaskell's attempt to shape them. One example is the letter to Nussey in which Brontë denies having published: " 'I have given no one a right either to affirm, or to hint, in the most distant manner, that I was 'publishing'—(humbug!) ... Though twenty books were ascribed to me, I should own

none.... The most profound obscurity is infinitely preferable to vulgar notoriety' " (p. 281). Gaskell calls this letter "confirmatory" of guilt in the "very vehemence... of intended denial," but this is one occasion that "those who know how to listen," as Gaskell describes her ideal reader, hear something other than Gaskell does, a playful tone that indicates mock anger and the spouting of lady-like correctness. Brontë is actually issuing an admission under the coy cover of a denial.

Brontë's reaction to the proposal of marriage she received from James Taylor has a different meaning for today's readers than it did for Victorians. Gaskell is eager to correct those who would "imagine, from the extraordinary power with which [Brontë] represented the passion of love in her novels, that she herself was easily susceptible of it" (p. 376). She offers Brontë's confession to Nussey that she could not accept Taylor because her "veins ran ice" when he approached her as proof of Brontë's natural modesty, thus distinguishing her from her passionate heroines. To a modern reader, however, the episode suggests, rather, the importance Brontë placed on sexual attraction in marriage.

There is an undulating movement to Gaskell's narrative in its liberal use of foreshadowing and compression. She uses compression particularly effectively in reproducing the Brontë funerary tablet in the first chapter. The memorial, with its lines "pressed together," the letters becoming "small and cramped" as "one dead member of the household follows another fast to the grave" mirrors the narrative's overall movement (p. 16). Brontë's memorial tablet, which Gaskell also reproduces at the end of chapter one, makes no mention of her professional achievement. On it she is stripped of all cultural referents except the titles of wife and daughter (p. 17). *The Life of Charlotte* Brontë, which does not refer to Brontë by her married name, is a monument that attempts to restore her complexity.

There is evidence that the Life served the corrective function Gaskell intended it to serve, rescuing Brontë's works for those who had dismissed the writer as "coarse." Gaskell received testimonials such as this one, from Charles Kingsley: "I gave up the writer and her books with a notion that she was a person who liked coarseness. How I misjudged her! ... Well have you done your work, and given us the picture of a valiant woman made perfect by sufferings. I shall now read carefully and lovingly every word she has

written” (to Gaskell, May 14, 1857; in Wise and Symington, eds., *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships, and Correspondence*, vol. 4, pp. 222—223). Those who come in search of this kind of vindication will find it, but for others the *Life* tells a different story, that of Brontë’s active struggle against constraints at the same time psychological and material, domestic and institutional. If Brontë does emerge from the pages of the Life as someone who studied “the path of duty well,” as Gaskell would have it, it is not as a victim, but rather as one who consciously “spent herself lavishly for others—lavishly and even wastefully,” as one reviewer observed (Easson, p. 380). It is the story of someone who is challenged by life, but not subdued by it: “ ‘Crushed I am not,’ ” Brontë told Nussey in the dark summer of 1849, “ ‘I have some strength to fight the battle of life’ ” (p. 313). The overall “effect of the book is melancholy,” one contemporary reviewer of the Life offered in summation, adding that although Gaskell’s Brontë was led by a “stern sense of duty... within that imprisonment of constraint was a really free spirit” (Easson, p. 383).

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THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË,

AUTHOR OF
“JANE EYRE,” “SHIRLEY,” “VILLETTE,” &c.
BY
E. C. GASKELL,
AUTHOR OF “MARY BARTON,” “RUTH,” ETC.

“Oh my God,
Thou hast knowledge, only Thou,
How dreary ’tis for women to sit still
On winter nights by solitary fires
And hear the nations praising them far off.”

AURORA LEIGH.

IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

The Leeds and Bradford railway runs along a deep valley of the Aire; a slow and sluggish stream, compared to the neighbouring river of Wharfe. Keighley station is on this line of railway, about a quarter of a mile from the town of the same name. The number of inhabitants and the importance of Keighley have been very greatly increased during the last twenty years, owing to the rapidly extended market for worsted manufactures, a branch of industry that mainly employs the factory population of this part of Yorkshire, which has Bradford for its centre and metropolis.

Keighley is in process of transformation from a populous, old-fashioned village, into a still more populous and flourishing town. It is evident to the stranger, that as the gable-ended houses, which obtrude themselves corner-wise on the widening street, fall vacant, they are pulled down to allow of greater space for traffic, and a more modern style of architecture. The quaint and narrow shop-windows of fifty years ago, are giving way to large panes and plate-glass. Nearly every dwelling seems devoted to some branch of commerce. In passing hastily through the town, one hardly perceives where the necessary lawyer and doctor can live, so little appearance is there of any dwellings of the professional middle-class, such as abound in our old cathedral towns. In fact, nothing can be more opposed than the state of society, the modes of thinking, the standards of reference on all points of morality, manners, and even politics and religion, in such a new manufacturing place as Keighley in the north, and any stately, sleepy, picturesque cathedral town in the south. Yet the aspect of Keighley promises well for future stateliness, if not picturesqueness. Grey stone abounds; and the rows of houses built of it have a kind of solid grandeur connected with their uniform and enduring lines. The frame-work of the doors, and the lintels of the windows, even in the smallest dwellings, are made of blocks of stone. There is no painted wood to require continual beautifying, or else present a shabby aspect; and the stone is kept scrupulously clean by the notable Yorkshire housewifes. Such glimpses into the interior as a passer-by obtains, reveal a rough abundance of the means of living, and diligent and active habits in the women. But the voices of the

people are hard, and their tones discordant, promising little of the musical taste that distinguishes the district, and which has already furnished a Carrodus [a] to the musical world. The names over the shops (of which the one just given is a sample) seem strange even to an inhabitant of the neighbouring county, and have a peculiar smack and flavour of the place.

The town of Keighley never quite melts into country on the road to Haworth, although the houses become more sparse as the traveller journeys upwards to the grey round hills that seem to bound his journey in a westerly direction. First come some villas; just sufficiently retired from the road to show that they can scarcely belong to any one liable to be summoned in a hurry, at the call of suffering or danger, from his comfortable fire-side; the lawyer, the doctor, and the clergyman, live at hand, and hardly in the suburbs, with a screen of shrubs for concealment.

In a town one does not look for vivid colouring; what there may be of this is furnished by the wares in the shops, not by foliage or atmospheric effects; but in the country some brilliancy and vividness seems to be instinctively expected, and there is consequently a slight feeling of disappointment at the grey neutral tint of every object, near or far off, on the way from Keighley to Haworth. The distance is about four miles; and, as I have said, what with villas, great worsted factories, rows of workmen’s houses, with here and there an old-fashioned farm-house and out-buildings, it can hardly be called “country” any part of the way. For two miles the road passes over tolerably level ground, distant hills on the left, a “beck” flowing through meadows on the right, and furnishing water power, at certain points, to the factories built on its banks. The air is dim and lightless with the smoke from all these habitations and places of business. The soil in the valley (or “bottom,” to use the local term) is rich; but, as the road begins to ascend, the vegetation becomes poorer; it does not flourish, it merely exists; and, instead of trees, there are only bushes and shrubs about the dwellings. Stone dykes are everywhere used in place of hedges; and what crops there are, on the patches of arable land, consist of pale, hungry-looking, grey-green oats. Right before the traveller on this road rises Haworth village; he can see it for two miles before he arrives, for it is situated on the side of a pretty steep hill, with a background of dun and purple moors, rising and sweeping away yet higher than the church, which is built at the very summit of the long

narrow street. All round the horizon there is this same line of sinuous wavelike hills; the scoops into which they fall only revealing other hills beyond, of similar colour and shape, crowned with wild, bleak moors—grand, from the ideas of solitude and loneliness which they suggest, or oppressive from the feeling which they give of being pent-up by some monotonous and illimitable barrier, according to the mood of mind in which the spectator may be.

For a short distance the road appears to turn away from Haworth, as it winds round the base of the shoulder of a hill; but then it crosses a bridge over the “beck,” and the ascent through the village begins. The flag-stones with which it is paved are placed end-ways, in order to give a better hold to the horses’ feet; and, even with this help, they seem to be in constant danger of slipping backwards. The old stone houses are high compared to the width of the street, which makes an abrupt turn before reaching the more level ground at the head of the village, so that the steep aspect of the place, in one part, is almost like that of a wall. But this surmounted, the church lies a little off the main road on the left; a hundred yards, or so, and the driver relaxes his care, and the horse breathes more easily, as they pass into the quiet little by-street that leads to Haworth Parsonage. The churchyard is on one side of this lane, the school-house and the sexton’s dwelling (where the curates formerly lodged) on the other.

The parsonage stands at right angles to the road, facing down upon the church; so that, in fact, parsonage, church, and belfried school-house, form three sides of an irregular oblong, of which the fourth is open to the fields and moors that lie beyond. The area of this oblong is filled up by a crowded churchyard, and a small garden or court in front of the clergyman’s house. As the entrance to this from the road is at the side, the path goes round the corner into the little plot of ground. Underneath the windows is a narrow flower-border, carefully tended in days of yore, although only the most hardy plants could be made to grow there. Within the stone wall, which keeps out the surrounding churchyard, are bushes of elder and lilac; the rest of the ground is occupied by a square grass plot and a gravel walk. The house is of grey stone, two-stories high, heavily roofed with flags, in order to resist the winds that might strip off a lighter covering. It appears to have been built about a hundred years ago, and to consist of four rooms on each

story; the two windows on the right (as the visitor stands, with his back to the church, ready to enter in at the front door) belonging to Mr. Brontë's study, the two on the left to the family sitting-room. Everything about the place tells of the most dainty order, the most exquisite cleanliness. The door-steps are spotless; the small old-fashioned window-panes glitter like looking-glass. Inside and outside of that house cleanliness goes up into its essence, purity.

The little church lies, as I mentioned, above most of the houses in the village; and the graveyard rises above the church, and is terribly full of upright tombstones. The chapel or church claims greater antiquity than any other in that part of the kingdom; but there is no appearance of this in the external aspect of the present edifice, unless it be in the two eastern windows, which remain unmodernized, and in the lower part of the steeple. Inside, the character of the pillars shows that they were constructed before the reign of Henry VII. It is probable that there existed on this ground a "field-kirk," or oratory, in the earliest times; and, from the archbishop's registry at York, it is ascertained that there was a chapel at Haworth in 1317. The inhabitants refer inquirers concerning the date to the following inscription on a stone in the church tower:—

"Hic fecit Cænobium Monachorum Auteste fundator. A. D. sexcentissimo." [1]

That is to say, before the preaching of Christianity in Northumbria. Whitaker says that this mistake originated in the illiterate copying out, by some modern stone-cutter, of an inscription in the character of Henry the Eighth's time on an adjoining stone:—

"Orate pro bono statu EutestTod."

"Now every antiquary knows that the formula of prayer 'bono statu' always refers to the living. I suspect this singular Christian name has been mistaken by the stone-cutter for Austet, a contraction of Eustatius, but the word Tod, which has been mis-read for the Arabic figures 600 is perfectly fair and legible. On the presumption of this foolish claim to antiquity, the people would needs set up for independence, and contest the right of the Vicar of Bradford to nominate a curate at Haworth."[2]

I have given this extract, in order to explain the imaginary groundwork of a commotion which took place in Haworth about five and thirty years ago, to which I shall have occasion to allude again more particularly.

The interior of the church is common-place; it is neither old enough nor modern enough to compel notice. The pews are of black oak, with high divisions; and the names of those to whom they belong are painted in white letters on the doors. There are neither brasses, nor altar-tombs, nor monuments, but there is a mural tablet on the right-hand side of the communion-table, bearing the following inscription:—

HERE

LIE THE REMAINS OF

MARIA BRONTË, WIFE

OF THE

REV P. BRONTE, A.B., MINISTER OF HAWORTH.

HER SOUL

DEPARTED TO THE SAVIOUR, SEPT. 15TH, 1821,

IN THE 39TH YEAR OF HER AGE.

“Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.”—Matthew xxiv. 44.

ALSO HERE LIE THE REMAINS OF

MARIA BRONTË, DAUGHTER OF THE AFORESAID;

SHE DIED ON THE

6TH OF MAY, 1825, IN THE 12THYEAR OF HER AGE,

AND OF

ELIZABETH BRONTË, HER SISTER,

WHO DIED JUNE 15TH, 1825, IN THE 11TH YEAR OF HER AGE.

“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”—Matthew xviii. 3.

HERE ALSO LIE THE REMAINS OF

PATRICK BRANWELL BRONTË,

WHO DIED SEPT. 24TH, 1848, AGED 30 YEARS.

AND OF

EMILY JANE BRONTË,

WHO DIED DEC. 19TH, 1848, AGED 29 YEARS,

SON AND DAUGHTER OF THE

REV. P. BRONTË, INCUMBENT.

THIS STONE IS ALSO DEDICATED TO THE

MEMORY OF ANNE BRONTË,

YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF THE REV P BRONTË, A.B.

SHE DIED, AGED 27 YEARS,[b] MAY 28TH, 1849,

AND WAS BURIED AT THE OLD CHURCH, SCARBORO'.

At the upper part of this tablet ample space is allowed between the lines of the inscription; when the first memorials were written down, the survivors, in their fond affection, thought little of the margin and verge they were leaving for those who were still living. But as one dead member of the household follows another fast to the grave, the lines are pressed together, and the letters become small and cramped. After the record of Anne's death, there is room for no other.

But one more of that generation—the last of that nursery of six little motherless children—was yet to follow, before the survivor, the childless and widowed father, found his rest. On another tablet, below the first, the following record has been added to that mournful list:—

ADJOINING LIE THE REMAINS OF

CHARLOTTE, WIFE

OF THE

REV ARTHUR BELL NICHOLLS, A.B.,

AND DAUGHTER OF THE REV. P. BRONTE, A.B., INCUMBENT.

SHE DIED MARCH 31 ST, 1855, IN THE 39TH

YEAR OF HER AGE.

CHAPTER II.

For a right understanding of the life of my dear friend, Charlotte Brontë, it appears to me more necessary in her case than in most others, that the reader should be made acquainted with the peculiar forms of population and society amidst which her earliest years were passed, and from which both her own and her sisters' first impressions of human life must have been received. I shall endeavour, therefore, before proceeding further with my work, to present some idea of the character of the people of Haworth, and the surrounding districts.

Even an inhabitant of the neighbouring county of Lancaster is struck by the peculiar force of character which the Yorkshiremen display. This makes them interesting as a race; while, at the same time, as individuals, the remarkable degree of self-sufficiency they possess gives them an air of independence rather apt to repel a stranger. I use this expression "self-sufficiency" in the largest sense. Conscious of the strong sagacity and the dogged power of will which seem almost the birthright of the natives of the West Riding, each man relies upon himself, and seeks no help at the hands of his neighbour. From rarely requiring the assistance of others, he comes to doubt the power of bestowing it; from the general success of his efforts, he grows to depend upon them, and to over-esteem his own energy and power. He belongs to that keen, yet short-sighted class, who consider suspicion of all whose honesty is not proved as a sign of wisdom. The practical qualities of a man are held in great respect; but the want of faith in strangers and untried modes of action, extends itself even to the manner in which the virtues are regarded; and if they produce no immediate and tangible result, they are rather put aside as unfit for this busy, striving world; especially if they are more of a passive than an active character. The affections are strong, and their foundations lie deep: but they are not—such affections seldom are—wide-spreading; nor do they show themselves on the surface. Indeed, there is little display of any of the amenities of life among this wild, rough population. Their accost is curt; their accent and tone of speech blunt and harsh. Something of this may, probably, be attributed to the freedom of mountain air and of isolated hill-side life; something be derived from their

rough Norse ancestry. They have a quick perception of character, and a keen sense of humour; the dwellers among them must be prepared for certain uncomplimentary, though most likely true, observations, pithily expressed. Their feelings are not easily roused, but their duration is lasting. Hence there is much close friendship and faithful service; and for a correct exemplification of the form in which the latter frequently appears, I need only refer the reader of “Wuthering Heights” to the character of “Joseph.”

From the same cause come also enduring grudges, in some cases amounting to hatred, which occasionally has been bequeathed from generation to generation. I remember Miss Brontë once telling me that it was a saying round about Haworth, “Keep a stone in thy pocket seven year; turn it, and keep it seven year longer, that it may be ever ready to thine hand when thine enemy draws near.”

The West Riding men are sleuth-hounds in pursuit of money. Miss Brontë related to my husband a curious instance illustrative of this eager desire for riches. A man that she knew, who was a small manufacturer, had engaged in many local speculations, which had always turned out well, and thereby rendered him a person of some wealth. He was rather past middle age, when he bethought him of insuring his life; and he had only just taken out his policy, when he fell ill of an acute disease which was certain to end fatally in a very few days. The doctor, half-hesitatingly, revealed to him his hopeless state. “By jingo!” cried he, rousing up at once into the old energy, “I shall do the insurance company! I always was a lucky fellow!”

These men are keen and shrewd; faithful and persevering in following out a good purpose, fell in tracking an evil one. They are not emotional; they are not easily made into either friends or enemies; but once lovers or haters, it is difficult to change their feeling. They are a powerful race both in mind and body, both for good and for evil.

The woollen manufacture was introduced into this district in the days of Edward III. It is traditionally said that a colony of Flemings came over and settled in the West Riding to teach the inhabitants what to do with their wool. The mixture of agricultural with manufacturing labour that ensued and prevailed in the West Riding up to a very recent period, sounds pleasant enough at this distance of time, when the classical impression is left, and

the details forgotten, or only brought to light by those who explore the few remote parts of England where the custom still lingers. The idea of the mistress and her maidens spinning at the great wheels while the master was abroad, ploughing his fields, or seeing after his flocks on the purple moors, is very poetical to look back upon; but when such life actually touches on our own days, and we can hear particulars from the lips of those now living, details of coarseness—of the uncouthness of the rustic mingled with the sharpness of the tradesman—of irregularity and fierce lawlessness—come out, that rather mar the vision of pastoral innocence and simplicity. Still, as it is the exceptional and exaggerated characteristics of any period that leave the most vivid memory behind them, it would be wrong, and in my opinion faithless, to conclude that such and such forms of society and modes of living were not best for the period when they prevailed, although the abuses they may have led into, and the gradual progress of the world, have made it well that such ways and manners should pass away for ever, and as preposterous to attempt to return to them, as it would be for a man to return to the clothes of his childhood.

The patent granted to Alderman Cockayne, and the further restrictions imposed by James I. on the export of undyed woollen cloths (met by a prohibition on the part of the States of Holland of the import of English-dyed cloths), injured the trade of the West Riding manufacturers considerably. Their independence of character, their dislike of authority, and their strong powers of thought, predisposed them to rebellion against the religious dictations of such men as Laud,[1] and the arbitrary rule of the Stuarts; and the injury done by James and Charles to the trade by which they gained their bread, made the great majority of them Commonwealth men.[2] I shall have occasion afterwards to give one or two instances of the warm feelings and extensive knowledge on subjects of both home and foreign politics existing at the present day in the villages lying west and east of the mountainous ridge that separates Yorkshire and Lancashire; the inhabitants of which are of the same race and possess the same quality of character.

The descendants of many who served under Cromwell at Dun-bar, live on the same lands as their ancestors occupied then; and perhaps there is no part

of England where the traditional and fond recollections of the Commonwealth have lingered so long as in that inhabited by the woollen manufacturing population of the West Riding, who had the restrictions taken off their trade by the Protector's admirable commercial policy. I have it on good authority that, not thirty years ago, the phrase, "in Oliver's days," was in common use to denote a time of unusual prosperity. The class of Christian names prevalent in a district is one indication of the direction in which its tide of hero-worship sets. Grave enthusiasts in politics or religion perceive not the ludicrous side of those which they give to their children; and some are to be found, still in their infancy, not a dozen miles from Haworth, that will have to go through life as Lamartine, Kossuth, and Dembinsky.[c] And so there is a testimony to what I have said, of the traditional feeling of the district, in the fact that the Old Testament names in general use among the Puritans are yet the prevalent appellations in most Yorkshire families of middle or humble rank, whatever their religious persuasion may be. There are numerous records, too, that show the kindly way in which the ejected ministers were received by the gentry, as well as by the poorer part of the inhabitants, during the persecuting days of Charles II.[3] These little facts all testify to the old hereditary spirit of independence, ready ever to resist authority which was conceived to be unjustly exercised, that distinguishes the people of the West Riding to the present day.

The parish of Halifax touches that of Bradford, in which the chapelry of Haworth is included; and the nature of the ground in the two parishes is much of the same wild and hilly description. The abundance of coal, and the number of mountain streams in the district, make it highly favourable to manufactures; and accordingly, as I stated, the inhabitants have for centuries been engaged in making cloth, as well as in agricultural pursuits. But the intercourse of trade failed, for a long time, to bring amenity and civilization into these outlying hamlets, or widely scattered dwellings. Mr. Hunter, in his "Life of Oliver Heywood,"[4] quotes a sentence out of a memorial of one James Rither, living in the reign of Elizabeth, which is partially true to this day—

"They have no superior to court, no civilities to practise: a sour and sturdy humour is the consequence, so that a stranger is shocked by a tone of

defiance in every voice, and an air of fierceness in every countenance."

Even now, a stranger can hardly ask a question without receiving some crusty reply, if, indeed, he receive any at all. Sometimes the sour rudeness amounts to positive insult. Yet, if the "foreigner" takes all this churlishness good-humouredly, or as a matter of course, and makes good any claim upon their latent kindliness and hospitality, they are faithful and generous, and thoroughly to be relied upon. As a slight illustration of the roughness that pervades all classes in these out-of-the-way villages, I may relate a little adventure which happened to my husband and myself, three years ago, at Addingham—

From Penigent to Pendle Hill,
From Linton to *Long-Addingham*,
And all that Craven coasts did tell, &c.

one of the places that sent forth its fighting men to the famous old battle of Flodden Field, and a village not many miles from Haworth.

We were driving along the street, when one of those ne'er-do-well lads who seem to have a kind of magnetic power for misfortunes, having jumped into the stream that runs through the place, just where all the broken glass and bottles are thrown, staggered naked and nearly covered with blood into a cottage before us. Besides receiving another bad cut in the arm he had completely laid open the artery, and was in a fair way of bleeding to death —which, one of his relations comforted him by saying, would be likely to "save a deal o' trouble."

When my husband had checked the effusion of blood with a strap that one of the bystanders unbuckled from his leg, he asked if a surgeon had been sent for.

"Yoi," was the answer; "but we dunna think he'll come."

"Why not?"

"He's owd, yo seen, and asthmatic, and it's up-hill."

My husband, taking a boy for his guide, drove as fast as he could to the surgeon's house, which was about three-quarters of a mile off, and met the aunt of the wounded lad leaving it.

“Is he coming?” inquired my husband.

“Well, he didna’ say he wouldna’ come.”

“But tell him the lad may bleed to death.”

“I did.”

“And what did he say?”

“Why, only, ‘D———n him; what do I care.’ ”

It ended, however, in his sending one of his sons, who, though not brought up to “the surgering trade,” was able to do what was necessary in the way of bandages and plaisters. The excuse made for the surgeon was, that “he was near eighty, and getting a bit doited, and had had a matter o’ twenty childer.”

Among the most unmoved of the lookers-on was the brother of the boy so badly hurt; and while he was lying in a pool of blood on the flag floor, and crying out how much his arm was “warching,” his stoical relation stood coolly smoking his bit of black pipe, and uttered not a single word of either sympathy or sorrow.

Forest customs, existing in the fringes of dark wood, which clothed the declivity of the hills on either side, tended to brutalize the population until the middle of the seventeenth century. Execution by beheading was performed in a summary way upon either men or women who were guilty of but very slight crimes; and a dogged, yet in some cases fine, indifference to human life was thus generated. The roads were so notoriously bad, even up to the last thirty years, that there was little communication between one village and another; if the produce of industry could be conveyed at stated times to the cloth market of the district, it was all that could be done; and, in lonely houses on the distant hill-side, or by the small magnates of secluded hamlets, crimes might be committed almost unknown, certainly without any great uprising of popular indignation calculated to bring down the strong arm of the law. It must be remembered that in those days there was no rural constabulary; and the few magistrates left to themselves, and generally related to one another, were most of them inclined to tolerate eccentricity, and to wink at faults too much like their own.

Men hardly past middle life talk of the days of their youth, spent in this part of the country, when, during the winter months, they rode up to the saddle-girths in mud; when absolute business was the only reason for stirring beyond the precincts of home; and when that business was conducted under a pressure of difficulties which they themselves, borne along to Bradford market in a swift first-class carriage, can hardly believe to have been possible. For instance, one woollen manufacturer says that, not five-and-twenty years ago, he had to rise betimes to set off on a winter's morning in order to be at Bradford with the great waggon-load of goods manufactured by his father: this load was packed over-night, but in the morning there was great gathering around it, and flashing of lanterns, and examination of horses' feet, before the ponderous waggon got under weigh; and then some one had to go groping here and there, on hands and knees, and always sounding with a staff down the long, steep, slippery brow, to find where the horses might tread safely, until they reached the comparative easy going of the deep rutted main road. People went on horseback over the upland moors, following the tracks of the packhorses that carried the parcels, baggage, or goods from one town to another, between which there did not happen to be a highway.

But in the winter, all such communication was impossible, by reason of the snow which lay long and late on the bleak high ground. I have known people who, travelling by the mail-coach over Black-stone Edge, had been snowed up for a week or ten days at the little inn near the summit, and obliged to spend both Christmas and New Year's Day there, till the store of provisions laid in for the use of the landlord and his family falling short before the inroads of the unexpected visitors, they had recourse to the turkeys, geese, and Yorkshire pies with which the coach was laden; and even these were beginning to fail, when a fortunate thaw released them from their prison.

Isolated as the hill villages may be, they are in the world, compared with the loneliness of the grey ancestral houses to be seen here and there in the dense hollows of the moors. These dwellings are not large, yet they are solid and roomy enough for the accommodation of those who live in them and to whom the surrounding estates belong. The land has often been held by one family since the days of the Tudors; the owners are, in fact, the

remains of the old yeomanry—small squires, who are rapidly becoming extinct as a class, from one of two causes. Either the possessor falls into idle, drinking habits, and so is obliged eventually to sell his property: or he finds, if more shrewd and adventurous, that the “beck” running down the mountain side, or the minerals beneath his feet, can be turned into a new source of wealth: and leaving the old plodding life of a landowner with small capital, he turns manufacturer, or digs for coal, or quarries for stone.

Still there are those remaining of this class—dwellers in the lonely houses far away in the upland districts—even at the present day, who sufficiently indicate what strange eccentricity—what wild strength of will—nay, even what unnatural power of crime was fostered by a mode of living in which a man seldom met his fellows, and where public opinion was only a distant and inarticulate echo of some clearer voice sounding behind the sweeping horizon.

A solitary life cherishes mere fancies until they become manias. And the powerful Yorkshire character which was scarcely tamed into subjection by all the contact it met with in “busy town or crowded mart,” has before now broken out into strange wilfulness in the remoter districts. A singular account was recently given me of a landowner (living it is true, on the Lancashire side of the hills, but of the same blood and nature as the dwellers on the other) who was supposed to be in the receipt of seven or eight hundred a year, and whose house bore marks of handsome antiquity, as if his forefathers had been for a long time people of consideration. My informant was struck with the appearance of the place, and proposed to the countryman who was accompanying him, to go up to it and take a nearer inspection. The reply was, “Yo’d better not; he’d threap yo down th’ loan. He’s let fly at some folks’ legs, and let shot lodge in ’em afore now, for going too near to his house.” And finding, on closer inquiry, that such was really the inhospitable custom of this moorland squire, the gentleman gave up his purpose. I believe that the savage yeoman is still living.

Another squire, of more distinguished family and larger property—one is thence led to imagine of better education, but that does not always follow—died at his house, not many miles from Haworth, only a few years ago. His great amusement and occupation had been cock-fighting. When he was confined to his chamber with what he knew would be his last illness, he had

his cocks brought up there, and watched the bloody battle from his bed. As his mortal disease increased, and it became impossible for him to turn so as to follow the combat, he had looking-glasses arranged in such a manner around and above him, as he lay, that he could still see the cocks fighting. And in this manner he died.

These are merely instances of eccentricity compared to the tales of positive violence and crime that have occurred in these isolated dwellings, which still linger in the memories of the old people of the district, and some of which were doubtless familiar to the authors of “Wuthering Heights” and “The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.”

The amusements of the lower classes could hardly be expected to be more humane than those of the wealthy and better educated. The gentleman who has kindly furnished me with some of the particulars I have given, remembers the bull-baitings at Rochdale, not thirty years ago. The bull was fastened by a chain or rope to a post in the river. To increase the amount of water, as well as to give their workpeople the opportunity of savage delight, the masters were accustomed to stop their mills on the day when the sport took place. The bull would sometimes wheel suddenly round, so that the rope by which he was fastened, swept those who had been careless enough to come within its range down into the water, and the good people of Rochdale had the excitement of seeing one or two of their neighbours drowned, as well as of witnessing the bull baited, and the dogs torn and tossed.

The people of Haworth were not less strong and full of character than their neighbours on either side of the hill. The village lies embedded in the moors, between the two counties, on the old road between Keighley and Colne. About the middle of the last century, it became famous in the religious world as the scene of the ministrations of the Rev. William Grimshaw,[5] curate of Haworth for twenty years. Before this time, it is probable that the curates were of the same order as one Mr. Nicholls, a Yorkshire clergyman in the days immediately succeeding the Reformation, who was “much addicted to drinking and company-keeping,” and used to say to his companions, “You must not heed me but when I am got three feet above the earth,” that was, into the pulpit.

Mr. Grimshaw's life was written by Newton, Cowper's friend; [6] and from it may be gathered some curious particulars of the manner in which a rough population were swayed and governed by a man of deep convictions, and strong earnestness of purpose. It seems that he had not been in any way remarkable for religious zeal, though he had led a moral life, and been conscientious in fulfilling his parochial duties, until a certain Sunday in September, 1744, when the servant, rising at five, found her master already engaged in prayer; she stated that, after remaining in his chamber for some time, he went to engage in religious exercises in the house of a parishioner, then home again to pray; thence, still fasting, to the church, where, as he was reading the second lesson, he fell down, and, on his partial recovery, had to be led from the church. As he went out, he spoke to the congregation, and told them not to disperse, as he had something to say to them, and would return presently. He was taken to the clerk's house, and again became insensible. His servant rubbed him, to restore the circulation; and when he was brought to himself "he seemed in a great rapture," and the first words he uttered were "I have had a glorious vision from the third heaven." He did not say what he had seen, but returned into the church, and began the service again, at two in the afternoon, and went on until seven.

From this time he devoted himself, with the fervour of a Wesley, and something of the fanaticism of a Whitefield,[7] to calling out a religious life among his parishioners. They had been in the habit of playing at foot-ball on Sunday, using stones for this purpose; and giving and receiving challenges from other parishes. There were horse-races held on the moors just above the village, which were periodical sources of drunkenness and profligacy. Scarcely a wedding took place without the rough amusement of footraces, where the half naked runners were a scandal to all decent strangers. The old custom of "arvills," or funeral feasts, led to frequent pitched battles between the drunken mourners. Such customs were the outward signs of the kind of people with whom Mr. Grimshaw had to deal. But, by various means, some of the most practical kind, he wrought a great change in his parish. In his preaching he was occasionally assisted by Wesley and Whitefield, and at such times the little church proved much too small to hold the throng that poured in from distant villages, or lonely moorland hamlets; and frequently they were obliged to meet in the open air;

indeed, there was not room enough in the church even for the communicants. Mr. Whitefield was once preaching in Haworth, and made use of some such expression, as that he hoped there was no need to say much to this congregation, as they had sat under so pious and godly a minister for so many years; “whereupon Mr. Grimshaw stood up in his place, and said with a loud voice, ‘Oh, sir! for God’s sake do not speak so. I pray you do not flatter them. I fear the greater part of them are going to hell with their eyes open.’ ” But if they were so bound, it was not for want of exertion on Mr. Grimshaw’s part to prevent them. He used to preach twenty or thirty times a week in private houses. If he perceived any one inattentive to his prayers, he would stop and rebuke the offender, and not go on till he saw every one on their knees. He was very earnest in enforcing the strict observance of Sunday; and would not even allow his parishioners to walk in the fields between services. He sometimes gave out a very long Psalm (tradition says the 119th), and while it was being sung, he left the reading-desk, and taking a horsewhip went into the public-houses, and flogged the loiterers into church. They were swift who could escape the lash of the parson by sneaking out the back way. He had strong health and an active body, and rode far and wide over the hills, “awakening” those who had previously had no sense of religion. To save time, and be no charge to the families at whose houses he held his prayer-meetings, he carried his provisions with him; all the food he took in the day on such occasions consisting simply of a piece of bread and butter, or dry bread and a raw onion.

The horse-races were justly objectionable to Mr. Grimshaw; they attracted numbers of profligate people to Haworth, and brought a match to the combustible materials of the place, only too ready to blaze out into wickedness. The story is, that he tried all means of persuasion, and even intimidation, to have the races discontinued, but in vain. At length, in despair, he prayed with such fervor of earnestness that the rain came down in torrents, and deluged the ground, so that there was no footing for man or beast, even if the multitude had been willing to stand such a flood let down from above. And so Haworth races were stopped, and have never been resumed to this day. Even now the memory of this good man is held in

reverence, and his faithful ministrations and real virtues are one of the boasts of the parish.

But after his time, I fear there was a falling back into the wild rough heathen ways, from which he had pulled them up, as it were, by the passionate force of his individual character. He had built a chapel for the Wesleyan Methodists, and not very long after the Baptists established themselves in a place of worship. Indeed, as Dr. Whitaker says, the people of this district are “strong religionists;” only, fifty years ago, their religion did not work down into their lives. Half that length of time back, the code of morals seemed to be formed upon that of their Norse ancestors. Revenge was handed down from father to son as an hereditary duty; and a great capability for drinking, without the head being affected, was considered as one of the manly virtues. The games of foot-ball on Sundays, with the challenges to the neighbouring parishes, were resumed, bringing in an influx of riotous strangers to fill the public-houses, and make the more sober-minded inhabitants long for good Mr. Grimshaw’s stout arm, and ready horsewhip. The old custom of “arvills” was as prevalent as ever. The sexton, standing at the foot of the open grave, announced that the “arvill” would be held at the Black Bull, or whatever public-house might be fixed upon by the friends of the dead; and thither the mourners and their acquaintances repaired. The origin of the custom had been the necessity of furnishing some refreshment for those who came from a distance, to pay the last mark of respect to a friend. In the life of Oliver Heywood there are two quotations, which show what sort of food was provided for “arvills” in quiet Nonconformist connections in the seventeenth century; the first (from Thoresby) tells of “cold possets, stewed prunes, cake, and cheese,” as being the arvill after Oliver Heywood’s funeral. The second gives, as rather shabby, according to the notion of the times (1673), “nothing but a bit of cake, draught of wine, piece of rosemary, and pair of gloves.”

But the arvills at Haworth were often far more jovial doings. Among the poor, the mourners were only expected to provide a kind of spiced roll for each person; and the expense of the liquors—rum, or ale, or a mixture of both called “dog’s nose”—was generally defrayed by each guest placing some money on a plate, set in the middle of the table. Richer people would order dinner for their friends. At the funeral of Mr. Charnock (the next

successor but one to Mr. Grimshaw in the incumbency), above eighty people were bid to the arvill, and the price of the feast was 4s. 6d. per head, all of which was defrayed by the friends of the deceased. As few “shirked their liquor,” there were very frequently “up-and-down-fights” before the close of the day; sometimes with the horrid additions of “pawsing” and “gouging,” and biting.

Although I have dwelt on the exceptional traits in the characteristics of these stalwart West-Ridingers, such as they were in the first quarter of this century, if not a few years later, I have little doubt that in the every-day life of the people so independent, wilful, and full of grim humour, there would be much found even at present that would shock those accustomed only to the local manners of the south; and, in return, I suspect the shrewd, sagacious, energetic Yorkshire man would hold such “foreigners” in no small contempt.

I have said it is most probable that where Haworth Church now stands, there was once an ancient “field-kirk,” or oratory. It occupied the third or lowest class of ecclesiastical structures, according to the Saxon law, and had no right of sepulture, or administration of sacraments. It was so called because it was built without enclosure, and open to the adjoining fields or moors. The founder, according to the laws of Edgar, was bound, without subtracting from his tithes, to maintain the ministering priest out of the remaining nine parts of his income. After the Reformation, the right of choosing their clergyman, at any of those chapels of ease, which had formerly been fieldkirks, was vested in the freeholders and trustees subject to the approval of the vicar of the parish. But owing to some negligence, this right has been lost to the freeholders and trustees at Haworth, ever since the days of Archbishop Sharp; and the power of choosing a minister has lapsed into the hands of the Vicar of Bradford. So runs the account, according to one authority. Mr. Brontë says,—“This living has for its patrons the Vicar of Bradford and certain trustees. My predecessor took the living with the consent of the Vicar of Bradford, but in opposition to the trustees; in consequence of which he was so opposed that, after only three weeks’ possession, he was compelled to resign.”

In conversing on the character of the inhabitants of the West Riding with Dr. Scoresby,[8] who had been for some time Vicar of Bradford, he alluded to certain riotous transactions which had taken place at Haworth on the presentation of the living to Mr. Redhead, Mr. Brontë's predecessor; and said that there had been so much in the particulars indicative of the character of the people, that he advised me to inquire into them. I have accordingly done so, and, from the lips of some of the survivors among the actors and spectators, I have learnt the means taken to eject the nominee of the Vicar.

The previous incumbent, next but one in succession to Mr. Grimshaw, had been a Mr. Charnock. He had a long illness which rendered him unable to discharge his duties without assistance, and Mr. Redhead came to help him. As long as Mr. Charnock lived, his curate gave the people much satisfaction, and was highly regarded by them. But the case was entirely altered when, at Mr. Charnock's death in 1819 they conceived that the trustees had been unjustly deprived of their rights by the Vicar of Bradford, who appointed Mr. Redhead as perpetual curate.

The first Sunday he officiated, Haworth church was filled even to the aisles; most of the people wearing the wooden clogs of the district. But while Mr. Redhead was reading the second lesson, the whole congregation, as by one impulse, began to leave the church, making all the noise they could with clattering and clumping of clogs, till, at length, Mr. Redhead and the clerk were the only two left to continue the service. This was bad enough, but the next Sunday the proceedings were far worse. Then, as before, the church was well filled, but the aisles were left clear; not a creature, not an obstacle was in the way. The reasons for this was made evident about the same time in the reading of the service as the disturbances had begun the previous week. A man rode into the church upon an ass, with his face turned towards the tail, and as many old hats piled on his head, as he could possibly carry. He began urging his beast round the aisles, and the screams and cries, and laughter of the congregation entirely drowned all sound of Mr. Redhead's voice; and, I believe, he was obliged to desist.

Hitherto they had not proceeded to anything like personal violence; but on the third Sunday they must have been greatly irritated at seeing Mr.

Redhead, determined to brave their will, ride up the village street, accompanied by several gentlemen from Bradford. They put up their horses at the Black Bull—the little inn close upon the churchyard, for the convenience of arvills as well as for other purposes—and went into church. On this the people followed, with a chimney-sweeper, whom they had employed to clean the chimneys of some outbuildings belonging to the church that very morning, and afterwards plied with drink till he was in a state of solemn intoxication. They placed him right before the reading-desk, where his blackened face nodded a drunken, stupid assent to all that Mr. Redhead said. At last, either prompted by some mischief-maker, or from some tipsy impulse, he clambered up the pulpit stairs, and attempted to embrace Mr. Redhead. Then the profane fun grew fast and furious. They pushed the soot-covered chimney-sweeper against Mr. Redhead, as he tried to escape. They threw both him and his tormentor down on the ground in the churchyard where the soot bag had been emptied, and, though, at last, Mr. Redhead escaped into the Black Bull, the doors of which were immediately barred, the people raged without, threatening to stone him and his friends. One of my informants is an old man, who was the landlord of the Black Bull at the time, and he stands to it that such was the temper of the irritated mob, that Mr. Redhead was in real danger of his life. This man, however, planned an escape for his unpopular inmates. The Black Bull is near the top of the long, steep Haworth street, and at the bottom, close by the bridge, on the road to Keighley, is a turnpike. Giving directions to his hunted guests to steal out at the back door (through which, probably, many a ne’er-do-weel has escaped from good Mr. Grimshaw’s horsewhip), the landlord and some of the stable boys rode the horses belonging to the party from Bradford backwards and forwards before his front door, among the fiercely-expectant crowd. Through some opening between the houses, those on the horses saw Mr. Redhead and his friends creeping along behind the street; and then, striking spurs, they dashed quickly down to the turnpike; the obnoxious clergyman and his friends mounted in haste, and had sped some distance before the people found out that their prey had escaped, and came running to the closed turnpike gate.

This was Mr. Redhead’s last appearance at Haworth for many years. Long afterwards, he came to preach and in his sermon to a large and attentive

congregation, he good-humouredly reminded them of the circumstances which I have described.[9] They gave him a hearty welcome, for they owed him no grudge; although before they had been ready enough to stone him, in order to maintain what they considered to be their rights.

Into the midst of this lawless, yet not unkindly population, Mr. Brontë brought his wife and six little children, in February, 1820. There are those yet alive who remember seven heavily laden carts lumbering slowly up the long stone street, bearing the “new parson’s” household goods to his future abode.

One wonders how the bleak aspect of her new home—the low, oblong, stone parsonage, high up, yet with a still higher back-ground of sweeping moors—struck on the gentle, delicate wife, whose health even then was failing.

CHAPTER III.

The Rev. Patrick Brontë is a native of the County Down in Ireland. [1] His father, Hugh Brontë, was left an orphan at an early age. He came from the south to the north of the island, and settled in the parish of Ahaderg, near Loughbrickland. There was some family tradition that, humble as Hugh Brontë's circumstances were, he was the descendant of an ancient family. But about this neither he nor his descendants have cared to inquire. He made an early marriage, and reared and educated ten children on the proceeds of the few acres of land which he farmed. This large family were remarkable for great physical strength, and much personal beauty. Even in his old age, Mr. Brontë is a striking looking man, above the common height, with a nobly shaped head, and erect carriage. In his youth he must have been unusually handsome.

He was born on Patrickmas day (March 17), 1777, and early gave tokens of extraordinary quickness and intelligence. He had also his full share of ambition; and of his strong sense and forethought there is a proof in the fact, that, knowing that his father could afford him no pecuniary aid, and that he must depend upon his own exertions, he opened a public school at the early age of sixteen; and this mode of living he continued to follow for five or six years. He then became a tutor in the family of the Rev. Mr. Tighe, rector of Drumgooland parish. Thence he proceeded to St. John's College, Cambridge, where he was entered in July, 1802, being at the time five-and-twenty years of age. After nearly four years' residence, he obtained his B. A. degree, and was ordained to a curacy in Essex, whence he removed into Yorkshire. The course of life of which this is the outline, shows a powerful and remarkable character, originating and pursuing a purpose in a resolute and independent manner. Here is a youth—a boy of sixteen—separating himself from his family, and determining to maintain himself; and that, not in the hereditary manner by agricultural pursuits, but by the labour of his brain.

I suppose, from what I have heard, that Mr. Tighe became strongly interested in his children's tutor, and may have aided him, not only in the

direction of his studies, but in the suggestion of an English university education, and in advice as to the mode in which he should obtain entrance there. Mr. Brontë has now no trace of his Irish origin remaining in his speech; he never could have shown his Celtic descent in the straight Greek lines and long oval of his face; but at five-and-twenty, fresh from the only life he had ever known, to present himself at the gates of St. John's proved no little determination of will, and scorn of ridicule.

While at Cambridge, he became one of a corps of volunteers, who were then being called out all over the country to resist the apprehended invasion by the French. I have heard him allude, in late years, to Lord Palmerston as one who had often been associated with him then in the mimic military duties which they had to perform.[2]

We take him up now settled as a curate at Hartshead, in Yorkshire—far removed from his birth-place and all his Irish connections; with whom, indeed, he cared little to keep up any intercourse, and whom he never, I believe, re-visited after becoming a student at Cambridge.

Hartshead is a very small village, lying to the east of Huddersfield and Halifax; and, from its high situation—on a mound, as it were, surrounded by a circular basin—commanding a magnificent view. Mr. Brontë resided here for five years; and, while the incumbent of Hartshead, he wooed and married Maria Branwell.

She was the third daughter of Mr. Thomas Branwell, merchant, of Penzance. Her mother's maiden name was Carne: and, both on father's and mother's side, the Branwell family were sufficiently well descended to enable them to mix in the best society that Penzance then afforded. Mr. and Mrs. Branwell would be living—their family of four daughters and one son, still children—during the existence of that primitive state of society which is well described by Dr. Davy in the life of his brother.

"In the same town, when the population was about 2,000 persons, there was only one carpet, the floors of rooms were sprinkled with sea-sand, and there was not a single silver fork.

"At that time, when our colonial possessions were very limited, our army and navy on a small scale, and there was comparatively little demand for

intellect, the younger sons of gentlemen were often of necessity brought up to some trade or mechanical art, to which no discredit, or loss of caste, as it were, was attached. The eldest son, if not allowed to remain an idle country squire, was sent to Oxford or Cambridge, preparatory to his engaging in one of the three liberal professions of divinity, law, or physic; the second son was perhaps apprenticed to a surgeon or apothecary, or a solicitor; the third to a pewterer or watchmaker; the fourth to a packer or mercer, and so on, were there more to be provided for.

"After their apprenticeships were finished, the young men almost invariably went to London to perfect themselves in their respective trade or art: and on their return into the country, when settled in business, they were not excluded from what would now be considered genteel society. Visiting then was conducted differently from what it is at present. Dinner-parties were almost unknown, excepting at the annual feast-time. Christmas, too, was then a season of peculiar indulgence and conviviality, and a round of entertainments was given, consisting of tea and supper. Excepting at these two periods, visiting was almost entirely confined to tea-parties, which assembled at three o'clock, broke up at nine, and the amusement of the evening was commonly some round game at cards, as Pope Joan, or Commerce. The lower class was then extremely ignorant, and all classes were very superstitious; even the belief in witches maintained its ground, and there was an almost unbounded credulity respecting the supernatural and monstrous. There was scarcely a parish in the Mount's Bay that was without a haunted house, or a spot to which some story of supernatural horror was not attached. Even when I was a boy, I remember a house in the best street of Penzance which was uninhabited because it was believed to be haunted, and which young people walked by at night at a quickened pace, and with a beating heart. Amongst the middle and higher classes there was little taste for literature, and still less for science, and their pursuits were rarely of a dignified or intellectual kind. Hunting, shooting, wrestling, cock-fighting, generally ending in drunkenness, were what they most delighted in. Smuggling was carried on to a great extent; and drunkenness, and a low state of morals, were naturally associated with it. Whilst smuggling was the means of acquiring wealth to bold and reckless adventurers, drunkenness and dissipation occasioned the ruin of many respectable families."

I have given this extract because I conceive it bears some reference to the life of Miss Brontë, whose strong mind and vivid imagination must have received their first impressions either from the servants (in that simple household, almost friendly companions during the greater part of the day) retailing the traditions or the news of Haworth village; or from Mr. Brontë, whose intercourse with his children appears to have been considerably restrained, and whose life, both in Ireland and at Cambridge, had been spent under peculiar circumstances; or from her aunt, Miss Branwell, who came to the parsonage, when Charlotte was only six or seven years old, to take charge of her dead sister's family. This aunt was older than Mrs. Brontë, and had lived longer among the Penzance society, which Dr. Davy describes. But in the Branwell family itself, the violence and irregularity of nature did not exist. They were Methodists, and, as far as I can gather, a gentle and sincere piety gave refinement and purity of character. Mr. Branwell, the father, according to his descendants' account, was a man of musical talent. He and his wife lived to see all their children grown-up, and died within a year of each other—he in 1808, she in 1809, when their daughter Maria was twenty-five or twenty-six years of age. I have been permitted to look over a series of nine letters, which were addressed by her to Mr. Brontë, during the brief term of their engagement in 1812. They are full of tender grace of expression, and feminine modesty; pervaded by the deep piety to which I have alluded as a family characteristic. I shall make one or two extracts from them, to show what sort of a person was the mother of Charlotte Brontë: but first, I must state the circumstances under which this Cornish lady met the scholar from Ahaderg, near Loughbrickland. In the early summer of 1812, when she would be twenty-nine, she came to visit her uncle, the Reverend John Fennel, who was at that time a clergyman of the Church of England, living near Leeds, but who had previously been a Methodist minister. Mr. Brontë was the incumbent of Hartshead; and had the reputation in the neighbourhood of being a very handsome fellow, full of Irish enthusiasm, and with something of an Irishman's capability of falling easily in love. Miss Branwell was extremely small in person; not pretty, but very elegant, and always dressed with a quiet simplicity of taste, which accorded well with her general character, and of which some of the details call to mind the style of dress preferred by her daughter for her favourite heroines. Mr. Brontë was soon captivated by

the little, gentle creature, and this time declared that it was for life. In her first letter to him, dated August 26th, she seems almost surprised to find herself engaged, and alludes to the short time which she has known him. In the rest there are touches reminding one of Juliet's—

"But trust me, gentlemen, I'll prove more true Than those that have more cunning to be strange."

There are plans for happy pic-nic parties to Kirkstall Abbey, in the glowing September days, when "Uncle, Aunt, and Cousin Jane,"—the last engaged to a Mr. Morgan, another clergyman—were of the party; all since dead, except Mr. Brontë. There was no opposition on the part of any of her friends to her engagement. Mr. and Mrs. Fennel sanctioned it, and her brother and sisters in far-away Penzance appear fully to have approved of it. In a letter dated September l8th, she says:—

"For some years I have been perfectly my own mistress, subject to no control whatever; so far from it, that my sisters, who are many years older than myself, and even my dear mother, used to consult me on every occasion of importance, and scarcely ever doubted the propriety of my opinions and actions: perhaps you will be ready to accuse me of vanity in mentioning this, but you must consider that I do not boast of it. I have many times felt it a disadvantage, and although, I thank God, it has never led me into error, yet, in circumstances of uncertainty and doubt, I have deeply felt the want of a guide and instructor." In the same letter she tells Mr. Brontë, that she has informed her sisters of her engagement, and that she should not see them again so soon as she had intended. Mr. Fennel, her uncle, also writes to them by the same post in praise of Mr. Brontë.

The journey from Penzance to Leeds in those days was both very long and very expensive; the lovers had not much money to spend in unnecessary travelling, and, as Miss Branwell had neither father nor mother living, it appeared both a discreet and seemly arrangement that the marriage should take place from her uncle's house. There was no reason either why the engagement should be prolonged. They were past their first youth; they had means sufficient for their unambitious wants; the living of Hartshead is rated in the Clergy List at 2021. per annum, and she was in the receipt of a small annuity (501. I have been told) by the will of her father. So, at the end

of September, the lovers began to talk about taking a house, for I suppose that Mr. Brontë up to that time had been in lodgings; and all went smoothly and successfully with a view to their marriage in the ensuing winter, until November, when a misfortune happened, which she thus patiently and prettily describes:—

"I suppose you never expected to be much the richer for me, but I am sorry to inform you that I am still poorer than I thought myself. I mentioned having sent for my books, clothes, &c. On Saturday evening, about the time when you were writing the description of your imaginary shipwreck, I was reading and feeling the effects of a real one, having then received a letter from my sister, giving me an account of the vessel in which she had sent my box being stranded on the coast of Devonshire, in consequence of which the box was dashed to pieces with the violence of the sea, and all my little property, with the exception of a very few articles, being swallowed up in the mighty deep. If this should not prove the prelude to something worse I shall think little of it, as it is the first disastrous circumstance which has occurred since I left my home."

The last of these letters is dated December the 5th. Miss Branwell and her cousin intended to set about making the wedding-cake in the following week, so the marriage could not be far off. She had been learning by heart a "pretty little hymn" of Mr. Brontë's composing;[3] and reading Lord Lyttelton's "Advice to a Lady,"[4] on which she makes some pertinent and just remarks, showing that she thought as well as read. And so Maria Branwell fades out of sight; we have no more direct intercourse with her; we hear of her as Mrs. Brontë, but it is as an invalid, not far from death; still patient, cheerful and pious. The writing of these letters is elegant and neat; while there are allusions to household occupations—such as making the wedding-cake-there are also allusions to the books she has read, or is reading, showing a well-cultivated mind. Without having any thing of her daughter's rare talents, Mrs. Brontë must have been, I imagine, that unusual character, a well-balanced and consistent woman. The style of the letters is easy and good; as is also that of a paper from the same hand, entitled "The Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns," which was written rather later, with a view to publication in some periodical.

She was married, from her uncle’s house, in Yorkshire on the 29th of December, 1812; the same day was also the wedding-day of her younger sister, Charlotte Branwell, in distant Penzance. I do not think that Mrs. Brontë ever revisited Cornwall, but she has left a very pleasant impression on the minds of those relations who yet survive; they speak of her as “their favourite aunt, and one to whom they, as well as all the family, looked up, as a person of talent and great amiability of disposition;” and, again, as “meek and retiring, while possessing more than ordinary talents, which she inherited from her father, and her piety was genuine and unobtrusive.”

Mr. Brontë remained for five years at Hartshead, in the parish of Dewsbury. There he was married, and his two children, Maria and Elizabeth, were born. At the expiration of that period, he had the living ofThornton, in Bradford parish. Some of those great West Riding parishes are almost like bishoprics for their amount of population and number of churches. Thornton church is a little episcopal chapel of ease, rich in Nonconformist monuments, as of Accepted Leister and his friend Dr. Hall. The neighbourhood is desolate and wild; great tracks of bleak land, enclosed by stone dykes, sweeping up Clayton heights. The church itself looks ancient and solitary, and as if left behind by the great stone mills of a flourishing Independent firm, and the solid square chapel built by the members of that denomination. Altogether not so pleasant a place as Hartshead, with its ample outlook over cloud-shadowed, sun-flecked plain, and hill rising beyond hill to form the distant horizon.

Here, at Thornton, Charlotte Brontë was born, on the 21st of April, 1816. Fast on her heels followed Patrick Branwell, Emily Jane, and Anne. After the birth of this last daughter, Mrs. Brontë’s health began to decline. It is hard work to provide for the little tender wants of many young children where the means are but limited. The necessaries of food and clothing are much more easily supplied than the almost equal necessaries of attendance, care, soothing, amusement, and sympathy Maria Brontë, the eldest of six, could only have been a few months more than six years old, when Mr. Brontë removed to Haworth, on February 25th, 1820. Those who knew her then, describe her as grave, thoughtful, and quiet, to a degree far beyond her years. Her childhood was no childhood; the cases are rare in which the possessors of great gifts have known the blessings of that careless happy

time; their unusual powers stir within them, and instead of the natural life of perception,—the objective, as the Germans call it—they begin the deeper life of reflection—the subjective.

Little Maria Brontë was delicate and small in appearance, which seemed to give greater effect to her wonderful precocity of intellect. She must have been her mother's companion and helpmate in many a household and nursery experience, for Mr. Brontë was, of course, much engaged in his study; and besides, he was not naturally fond of children, and felt their frequent appearance on the scene as a drag both on his wife's strength, and as an interruption to the comfort of the household.

Haworth Parsonage is—as I mentioned in the first chapter—an oblong stone house, facing down the hill on which the village stands, and with the front door right opposite to the western door of the church, distant about a hundred yards. Of this space twenty yards or so in depth are occupied by the grassy garden, which is scarcely wider than the house. The grave-yard goes round house and garden, on all sides but one. The house consists of four rooms on each floor, and is two stories high. When the Brontës took possession, they made the larger parlour, to the left of the entrance, the family sitting-room, while that on the right was appropriated to Mr. Brontë as a study. Behind this was the kitchen; behind the former, a sort of flagged storeroom. Up-stairs were four bed-chambers of similar size, with the addition of a small apartment over the passage, or "lobby" as we call it in the north. This was to the front, the staircase going up right opposite to the entrance. There is the pleasant old fashion of window seats all through the house; and one can see that the parsonage was built in the days when wood was plentiful, as the massive stair-bannisters, and the wainscots, and the heavy window frames testify.

This little extra up-stairs room was appropriated to the children. Small as it was, it was not called a nursery; indeed, it had not the comfort of a fireplace in it; the servants—two rough affectionate warm-hearted, wasteful sisters, who cannot now speak of the family without tears—called the room the "children's study." The age of the eldest student was perhaps by this time seven.

The people in Haworth were none of them very poor. Many of them were employed in the neighbouring worsted mills; a few were mill-owners and manufacturers in a small way; there were also some shopkeepers for the humbler and every-day wants; but for medical advice, for stationery, books, law, dress, or dainties, the inhabitants had to go to Keighley. There were several Sunday-schools; the Baptists had taken the lead in instituting them, the Wesleyans had followed, the Church of England had brought up the rear. Good Mr. Grimshaw, Wesley's friend, had built an humble Methodist chapel, but it stood close to the road leading on to the moor; the Baptists then raised a place of worship, with the distinction of being a few yards back from the highway ; and the Methodists have since thought it well to erect another and a larger chapel, still more retired from the road. Mr. Brontë was ever on kind and friendly terms with each denomination as a body; but from individuals in the village the family stood aloof, unless some direct service was required, from the first. "They kept themselves very close," is the account given by those who remember Mr. and Mrs. Brontë's coming amongst them. I believe many of the Yorkshiremen would object to the system of parochial visiting; their surly independence would revolt from the idea of any one having a right, from his office, to inquire, to counsel, or to admonish them. The old hill-spirit lingers in them, which coined the rhyme, inscribed on the under part of one of the seats in the Sedilia of Whalley Abbey, not many miles from Haworth,

"Who mells wi' what another does Had best go home and shoe his goose."

I asked an inhabitant of a district close to Haworth, what sort of a clergyman they had at the church which he attended.

"A rare good one," said he; "he minds his own business, and ne'er troubles himself with ours."

Mr. Brontë was faithful in visiting the sick, and all those who sent for him, and diligent in attendance at the schools; and so was his daughter Charlotte too; but, cherishing and valuing privacy themselves, they were perhaps over-delicate in not intruding upon the privacy of others.

From their first going to Haworth, their walks were directed rather out towards the heathery moors, sloping upwards behind the parsonage, than towards the long descending village street. A good old woman, who came

to nurse Mrs. Brontë in the illness—an internal cancer—which grew and gathered upon her, not many months after her arrival at Haworth, tells me that at that time the six little creatures used to walk out, hand in hand, towards the glorious wild moors, which in after days they loved so passionately; the elder ones taking thoughtful care for the toddling wee things.

They were grave and silent beyond their years; subdued, probably, by the presence of serious illness in the house; for, at the time which my informant speaks of, Mrs. Brontë was confined to the bedroom from which she never came forth alive. “You would not have known there was a child in the house, they were such still, noiseless, good little creatures. Maria would shut herself up” (Maria, but seven!) “in the children’s study with a newspaper, and be able to tell one every thing when she came out; debates in parliament, and I don’t know what all. She was as good as a mother to her sisters and brother. But there never were such good children. I used to think them spiritless, they were so different to any children I had ever seen. In part, I set it down to a fancy Mr. Brontë had of not letting them have flesh-meat to eat. It was from no wish for saving, for there was plenty and even waste in the house, with young servants and no mistress to see after them; but he thought that children should be brought up simply and hardily: so they had nothing but potatoes for their dinner;[5] but they never seemed to wish for anything else; they were good little creatures. Emily was the prettiest.”

Mrs. Brontë was the same patient, cheerful person as we have seen her formerly; very ill, suffering great pain, but seldom if ever complaining; at her better times begging her nurse to raise her in bed to let her see her clean the grate, “because she did it as it was done in Cornwall;” devotedly fond of her husband, who warmly repaid her affection, and suffered no one else to take the night-nursing; but, according to my informant, the mother was not very anxious to see much of her children, probably because the sight of them, knowing how soon they were to be left motherless, would have agitated her too much. So the little things clung quietly together, for their father was busy in his study and in his parish, or with their mother, and they took their meals alone; sat reading, or whispering low, in the “children’s study,” or wandered out on the hill-side, hand in hand.

The ideas of Rousseau and Mr. Day[6] on education had filtered down through many classes, and spread themselves widely out. I imagine, Mr. Brontë must have formed some of his opinions on the management of children from these two theorists. His practice was not half so wild or extraordinary as that to which an aunt of mine was subjected by a disciple of Mr. Day's. She had been taken by this gentleman and his wife, to live with them as their adopted child, perhaps about five-and-twenty years before the time of which I am writing. They were wealthy people and kind-hearted, but her food and clothing were of the very simplest and rudest description, on Spartan principles. A healthy merry child she did not much care for dress or eating; but the treatment which she felt as a real cruelty was this. They had a carriage, in which she and the favourite dog were taken an airing on alternate days; the creature whose turn it was to be left at home being tossed in a blanket—an operation which my aunt especially dreaded. Her affright at the tossing was probably the reason why it was persevered in. Dressed-up ghosts had become common, and she did not care for them, so the blanket exercise was to be the next mode of hardening her nerves. It is well known that Mr. Day broke off his intention of marrying Sabrina, the girl whom he had educated for this purpose, because, within a few weeks of the time fixed for the wedding, she was guilty of the frivolity, while on a visit from home, of wearing thin sleeves. Yet Mr. Day and my aunt's relations were benevolent people, only strongly imbued with the crotchet that by a system of training might be educed the hardihood and simplicity of the ideal savage, forgetting the terrible isolation of feelings and habits which their pupils would experience, in the future life which they must pass among the corruptions and refinements of civilization.

Mr. Brontë wished to make his children hardy, and indifferent to the pleasures of eating and dress. In the latter he succeeded, as far as regarded his daughters; but he went at his object with unsparing earnestness of purpose. Mrs. Brontë's nurse told me that one day when the children had been out on the moors, and rain had come on, she thought their feet would be wet, and accordingly she rummaged out some coloured boots which had been given to them by a friend—the Mr. Morgan who married "Cousin Jane," she believes. These little pairs she ranged round the kitchen fire to warm; but, when the children came back, the boots were nowhere to be

found; only a very strong odour of burnt leather was perceived. Mr. Brontë had come in and seen them; they were too gay and luxurious for his children, and would foster a love of dress; so he had put them into the fire. He spared nothing that offended his antique simplicity. Long before this, some one had given Mrs. Brontë a silk gown; either the make, the colour, or the material, was not according to his notions of consistent propriety, and Mrs. Brontë in consequence never wore it. But, for all that, she kept it treasured up in her drawers, which were generally locked. One day, however, while in the kitchen, she remembered that she had left the key in her drawer, and, hearing Mr. Brontë up-stairs, she augured some ill to her dress, and, running up in haste, she found it cut into shreds.

His strong, passionate, Irish nature was, in general, compressed down with resolute stoicism; but it was there notwithstanding all his philosophic calm and dignity of demeanour. He did not speak when he was annoyed or displeased, but worked off his volcanic wrath by firing pistols out of the back-door in rapid succession. Mrs. Brontë, lying in bed up-stairs, would hear the quick explosions, and know that something had gone wrong; but her sweet nature thought invariably of the bright side, and she would say, "Ought I not to be thankful that he never gave me an angry word?" Now and then his anger took a different form, but still speechless. Once he got the hearth-rug, and stuffing it up the grate, deliberately set it on fire, and remained in the room in spite of the stench, until it had smouldered and shrivelled away into uselessness. Another time he took some chairs, and sawed away at the backs till they were reduced to the condition of stools.[7]

He was an active walker, stretching away over the moors for many miles, noting in his mind all natural signs of wind and weather, and keenly observing all the wild creatures that came and went in the loneliest sweeps of the hills. He has seen eagles stooping low in search of food for their young; no eagle is ever seen on those mountain slopes now. He fearlessly took whatever side in local or national politics appeared to him right. In the days of the Luddites,[8] he had been for the peremptory interference of the law, at a time when no magistrate could be found to act, and all the property of the West Riding was in terrible danger. He became unpopular there among the mill-workers, and he esteemed his life unsafe if he took his long

and lonely walks unarmed; so he began the habit, which has continued to this day, of invariably carrying a loaded pistol about with him. It lay on his dressing-table with his watch; with his watch it was put on in the morning; with his watch it was taken off at night. Many years later, during his residence at Haworth, there was a strike; the hands in the neighbourhood felt themselves aggrieved by the masters, and refused to work; Mr. Brontë thought they had been unjustly and unfairly treated, and he assisted them by all the means in his power to "keep the wolf from their doors," and avoid the incubus of debt. Several of the more influential inhabitants of Haworth were mill-owners; they remonstrated pretty sharply with him, but he believed that his conduct was right, and persevered in it. His opinions might be often both wild and erroneous, his principles of action eccentric and strange, his views of life partial, and almost misanthropical; but not one opinion that he held could be stirred or modified by any worldly motive; he acted up to his principles of action; and, if any touch of misanthropy mingled with his view of mankind in general, his conduct to the individuals who came in personal contact with him did not agree with such view. It is true that he had strong and vehement prejudices, and was obstinate in maintaining them, and that he was not dramatic enough in his perceptions to see how miserable others might be in a life that to him was all-sufficient. But I do not pretend to be able to harmonize points of character, and account for them, and bring them all into one consistent and intelligible whole. The family with whom I have now to do shot their roots down deeper than I can penetrate. I cannot measure them, much less is it for me to judge them. I have named these instances of eccentricity in the father because I hold the knowledge of them to be necessary for a right understanding of the life of his daughter.

Mrs. Brontë died in September, 1821, and the lives of those quiet children must have become quieter and lonelier still. Charlotte tried hard, in after years, to recall the remembrance of her mother, and could bring back two or three pictures of her. One was when, sometime in the evening light, she had been playing with her little boy, Patrick Branwell, in the parlour of Haworth Parsonage. But the recollections of four or five years old are of a very fragmentary character.

Owing to some illness of the digestive organs, Mr. Brontë was obliged to be very careful about his diet; and, in order to avoid temptation, and possibly to have the quiet necessary for digestion, he had begun, before his wife's death, to take his dinner alone,—a habit which he always retained. He did not require companionship, therefore he did not seek it, either in his walks, or in his daily life. The quiet regularity of his domestic hours was only broken in upon by churchwardens, and visitors on parochial business; and sometimes by a neighbouring clergyman, who came down the hills, across the moors, to mount up again to Haworth Parsonage, and spend an evening there. But, owing to Mrs. Brontë's death so soon after her husband had removed into the district, and also to the distances, and the bleak country to be traversed, the wives of these clerical friends did not accompany their husbands; and the daughters grew up out of childhood into girlhood, bereft, in a singular manner, of all such society as would have been natural to their age, sex, and station. There was one family residing near Haworth who had been remarkably attentive and kind to Mrs. Brontë in her illness, and who had paid the children the attention of asking them occasionally to tea; and as the story connected with this family, and which, I suspect, dissolved their intercourse with their neighbours, made a deep impression on Charlotte's mind in her early girlhood, I may as well relate it here. It will serve as a specimen of the wild stories afloat in an isolated village, for as to its truth in minor particulars, I will not vouch; no more did she, the principal event having occurred when she was too young to understand its full import, and the tale having been heard with the addition, probably, of the whispered exaggerations of the uneducated. The family were Dissenters, professing some rather rigid form of religion. The father was a woollen manufacturer and moderately wealthy; at any rate, their style of living appeared "grand" to the simple children who bounded their ideas by the frugal habits of the parsonage. These people had a green-house, the only one in the neighbourhood; a cumbrous building; with more wood and wall than glass, situated in a garden which was divided from the house by the high road to Haworth. They had a large family; and one of the elder daughters was married to a wealthy manufacturer "beyond Keighley;" she was near her confinement, when she begged that a favourite young sister might go and pay her a visit, and remain with her till her baby was born. The request was complied with; the young girl—fifteen or sixteen years of

age—went. She came home, after some weeks spent in her brother-in-law's house, ill and dispirited. Inquiries were made of her by her parents, and it was discovered that she had been seduced by her sister's wealthy husband; and that the consequences of this wickedness would soon become apparent. Her angry and indignant father shut her up in her room, until he could decide how to act; her elder sisters flouted at and scorned her. Only her mother, and she was reported to be a stern woman, had some pity on her. The tale went, that passers along the high-road at night time saw the mother and young daughter walking in the garden, weeping, long after the household were gone to bed. Nay, more; it was whispered that they walked and wept there still, when Miss Brontë told me the tale—though both had long mouldered in their graves. The wild whisperers of this story added, that the cruel father, maddened perhaps by the disgrace which had fallen upon a "religious" family, offered a sum of money to any one who would marry his poor fallen daughter; that a husband was found, who bore her away from Haworth, and broke her heart, so that she died while even yet a child.

Such deep passionate resentment would have seemed not unnatural in a man who took a stern pride in his character for religious morality; but the degrading part, after all, was this. The remaining members of the family, elder sisters even, went on paying visits at their wealthy brother-in-law's house, as if his sin was not a hundred-fold more scarlet than the poor young girl's, whose evil-doing had been so hardly resented, and so coarsely hidden. The strong feeling of the country-side still holds the descendants of this family as accursed. They fail in business, or they fail in health.

At this house, I believe, the little Brontës paid their only visits; and these visits ceased before long.

But the children did not want society. To small infantine gaieties they were unaccustomed. They were all in all to each other. I do not suppose that there ever was a family more tenderly bound to each other. Maria read the newspapers, and reported intelligence to her younger sisters which it is wonderful they could take an interest in. But I suspect that they had no "children's books," and their eager minds "browzed undisturbed among the wholesome pasturage of English literature," as Charles Lamb expresses it. The servants of the household appear to have been much impressed with the

little Brontës' extraordinary cleverness. In a letter which I had from him on this subject, their father writes:—"The servants often said they had never seen such a clever little child" (as Charlotte), "and that they were obliged to be on their guard as to what they said and did before her. Yet she and the servants always lived on good terms with each other."

These servants are yet alive; elderly women residing in Bradford. They retain a faithful and fond recollection of Charlotte and speak of her unvarying kindness from the "time when she was ever such a little child!" when she would not rest till she had got the old disused cradle sent from the parsonage to the house where the parents of one of them lived, to serve for a little infant sister. They tell of one long series of kind and thoughtful actions from this early period to the last weeks of Charlotte Brontë's life; and, though she had left her place many years ago, one of these former servants went over from Bradford to Haworth on purpose to see Mr. Brontë, and offer him her true sympathy when his last child died. There might not be many to regard the Brontës with affection, but those who once loved them, loved them long and well.

I return to the father's letter. He says:—

"When mere children, as soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brothers and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own, in which the Duke of Wellington, my daughter Charlotte's hero, was sure to come off conqueror; when a dispute would not unfrequently arise amongst them regarding the comparative merits of him, Buonaparte, Hannibal, and Cæasar. When the argument got warm, and rose to its height, as their mother was then dead, I had sometimes to come in as arbitrator, and settle the dispute according to the best of my judgment. Generally, in the management of these concerns, I frequently thought that I discovered signs of rising talent, which I had seldom or never before seen in any of their age..... A circumstance now occurs to my mind which I may as well mention. When my children were very young, when, as far as I can remember, the oldest was about ten years of age, and the youngest about four, thinking they knew more than I had yet discovered, in order to make them speak with less timidity, I deemed that if they were put under a sort of cover I might gain my end; and happening to have a mask in the house, I told them all to stand and speak boldly from under cover of the mask.

“I began with the youngest (Anne, afterwards Acton Bell), and asked what a child like her most wanted; she answered, ‘Age and experience.’ I asked the next (Emily, afterwards Ellis Bell), what I had best do with her brother Branwell, who was sometimes a naughty boy; she answered, ‘Reason with him, and when he won’t listen to reason, whip him.’ I asked Branwell what was the best way of knowing the difference between the intellects of men and women; he answered, ‘By considering the difference between them as to their bodies.’ I then asked Charlotte what was the best book in the world; she answered, ‘The Bible.’ And what was the next best; she answered, ‘The Book of Nature.’ I then asked the next what was the best mode of education for a woman; she answered, ‘That which would make her rule her house well.’ Lastly I asked the oldest what was the best mode of spending time; she answered, ‘By laying it out in preparation for a happy eternity.’ I may not have given precisely their words, but I have nearly done so, as they made a deep and lasting impression on my memory. The substance, however, was exactly what I have stated.”

The strange and quaint simplicity of the mode taken by the father to ascertain the hidden characters of his children, and the tone and character of these questions and answers, show the curious education which was made by the circumstances surrounding the Brontës. They knew no other children. They knew no other modes of thought than what were suggested to them by the fragments of clerical conversation which they overheard in the parlour, or the subjects of village and local interest which they heard discussed in the kitchen. Each had their own strong characteristic flavour.

They took a vivid interest in the public characters, and the local and foreign politics discussed in the newspapers. Long before Maria Brontë died, at the age of eleven, her father used to say he could converse with her on any of the leading topics of the day with as much freedom and pleasure as with any grown-up person.

CHAPTER IV.

About a year after Mrs. Brontë's death, one of her elder sisters came from Penzance to superintend her brother-in-law's household, and look after his children. Miss Branwell was, I believe, a kindly and conscientious woman, with a good deal of character, but with the somewhat narrow ideas natural to one who had spent nearly all her life in the same place. She had strong prejudices, and soon took a distaste to Yorkshire. From Penzance, where plants which we in the north call greenhouse flowers grow in great profusion, and without any shelter even in the winter, and where the soft warm climate allows the inhabitants, if so disposed, to live pretty constantly in the open air, it was a great change for a lady considerably past forty to come and take up her abode in a place where neither flowers nor vegetables would flourish, and where a tree of even moderate dimensions might be hunted for far and wide; where the snow lay long and late on the moors, stretching bleakly and barely far up from the dwelling which was henceforward to be her home; and where often, on autumnal or winter nights, the four winds of heaven seemed to meet and rage together, tearing round the house as if they were wild beasts striving to find an entrance. She missed the small round of cheerful, social visiting perpetually going on in a country town; she missed the friends she had known from her childhood, some of whom had been her parents' friends before they were hers; she disliked many of the customs of the place, and particularly dreaded the cold damp arising from the flag floors in the passages and parlours of Haworth Parsonage. The stairs, too, I believe, are made of stone; and no wonder, when stone quarries are near, and trees are far to seek. I have heard that Miss Branwell always went about the house in pattens, clicking up and down the stairs, from her dread of catching cold. For the same reason, in the later years of her life, she passed nearly all her time, and took most of her meals, in her bed-room. The children respected her, and had that sort of affection for her which is generated by esteem; but I do not think they ever freely loved her. It was a severe trial for any one at her time of life to change neighbourhood and habitation so entirely as she did; and the greater her merit.

I do not know whether Miss Branwell taught her nieces any thing besides sewing, and the household arts in which Charlotte afterwards was such an adept. Their regular lessons were said to their father; and they were always in the habit of picking up an immense amount of miscellaneous information for themselves. But a year or so before this time, a school had been begun in the North of England for the daughters of clergymen. The place was Cowan's Bridge, a small hamlet on the coach-road between Leeds and Kendal, and thus easy of access from Haworth, as the coach ran daily, and one of its stages was at Keighley. The yearly expense for each pupil (according to the entrance-rules given in the Report for 1842, and I believe they had not been increased since the establishment of the school in 1823) was as follows:—

"Rule 11. The terms for clothing, lodging, boarding, and educating, are 141. a year; half to be paid in advance, when the pupils are sent; and also 11. entrance money, for the use of books, &c. The system of education comprehends history, geography, the use of the globes, grammar, writing and arithmetic, all kinds of needlework, and the nicer kinds of household work—such as getting up fine linen, ironing, &c. If accomplishments are required, an additional charge of 31. a year is made for music or drawing, each."

Rule 3d requests that the friends will state the line of education desired in the case of every pupil, having a prospective regard to her future prospects.

Rule 4th states the clothing and toilette articles which a girl is expected to bring with her; and thus concludes: "The pupils all appear in the same dress. They wear plain straw cottage bonnets, in summer white frocks on Sundays, and nankeen on other days; in winter, purple stuff frocks, and purple cloth cloaks. For the sake of uniformity, therefore, they are required to bring 31. in lieu of frocks, pelisse, bonnet, tippet, and frills; making the whole sum which each pupil brings with her to the school—

71. half-year in advance. 11. entrance for books. 11. entrance for clothes.

The 8th rule is—"All letters and parcels are inspected by the superintendent;" but this is a very prevalent regulation in all young ladies' schools, where I think it is generally understood that the schoolmistress

may exercise this privilege, although it is certainly unwise in her to insist too frequently upon it.

There is nothing at all remarkable in any of the other regulations, a copy of which was doubtless in Mr. Brontë's hands when he formed the determination to send his daughters to Cowan's Bridge School; and he accordingly took Maria and Elizabeth thither in July, 1824.

I now come to a part of my subject which I find great difficulty in treating, because the evidence relating to it on each side is so conflicting that it seems almost impossible to arrive at the truth. Miss Brontë more than once said to me, that she should not have written what she did of Lowood in "Jane Eyre," if she had thought the place would have been so immediately identified with Cowan's Bridge, although there was not a word in her account of the institution but what was true at the time when she knew it; she also said that she had not considered it necessary, in a work of fiction, to state every particular with the impartiality that might be required in a court of justice, nor to seek out motives, and make allowances for human feelings, as she might have done, if dispassionately analyzing the conduct of those who had the superintendence of the institution. I believe she herself would have been glad of an opportunity to correct the over-strong impression which was made upon the public mind by her vivid picture, though even she, suffering her whole life long, both in heart and body, from the consequences of what happened there, might have been apt, to the last, to take her deep belief in facts for the facts themselves—her conception of truth for the absolute truth.

A wealthy clergyman, living near Kirby Lonsdale, the Reverend William Carus Wilson,[1] was the prime mover in the establishment of this school. He was an energetic man, sparing no labour for the accomplishment of his ends, and willing to sacrifice everything but power. He saw that it was an extremely difficult task for clergymen with limited incomes to provide for the education of their children; and he devised a scheme, by which a certain sum was raised annually in subscription,[2] to complete the amount required to furnish a solid and sufficient English education, for which the parent's payment of 141. a year would not have been sufficient. Indeed that made by the parents was considered to be exclusively appropriated to the expenses of

lodging and boarding, and the education provided for by the subscriptions. Twelve trustees were appointed; Mr. Wilson being not only a trustee, but the treasurer and secretary; in fact, taking most of the business arrangements upon himself; a responsibility which appropriately fell to him, as he lived nearer the school than any one else who was interested in it. So his character for prudence and judgment was to a certain degree implicated in the success or failure of Cowan's Bridge School; and the working of it was for many years the great object and interest of his life. But he was apparently unacquainted with the prime element in good administration—seeking out thoroughly competent persons to fill each department, and then making them responsible for, and judging them by, the result, without perpetual and injudicious interference with the details. So great was the amount of good which Mr. Wilson did, by his constant, unwearied superintendence, that I cannot help feeling sorry that, in his old age and declining health, the errors, which he certainly committed, should have been brought up against him in a form which received such wonderful force from the touch of Miss Brontë's great genius. As I write, I have before me his last words on giving up the secretaryship in 1850—he speaks of the "withdrawal, from declining health, of an eye, which, at all events, has loved to watch over the schools with an honest and anxious interest,"—and again he adds, "that he resigns, therefore, with a desire to be thankful for all that God has been pleased to accomplish through his instrumentality (the infirmities and unworthinesses of which he deeply feels and deplores.)"

Cowan's Bridge is a cluster of some six or seven cottages, gathered together at both ends of a bridge, over which the high road from Leeds to Kendal crosses a little stream, called the Leck. This high road is nearly disused now; but formerly, when the buyers from the West Riding manufacturing districts had frequent occasion to go up into the North to purchase the wool of the Westmoreland and Cumberland farmers, it was doubtless much travelled; and perhaps the hamlet of Cowan's Bridge had a more prosperous look than it bears at present. It is prettily situated; just where the Leck-fells swoop into the plain; and by the course of the beck alder-trees and willows and hazel bushes grow. The current of the stream is interrupted by broken pieces of grey rock; and the waters flow over a bed of large round white pebbles, which a flood heaves up and moves on either

side out of its impetuous way till in some parts they almost form a wall. By the side of the little, shallow, sparkling, vigorous Leck, run long pasture fields, of the fine short grass common in high land; for though Cowan's Bridge is situated on a plain, it is a plain from which there is many a fall and long descent before you and the Leck reach the valley of the Lune. I can hardly understand how the school there came to be so unhealthy, the air all round about was so sweet and thyme-scented, when I visited it last summer. But at this day, every one knows that the site of a building intended for numbers should be chosen with far greater care than that of a private house, from the tendency to illness, both infectious and otherwise, produced by the congregation of people in close proximity.

The house is still remaining that formed part of that occupied by the school. It is a long, low bow-windowed cottage, now divided into two dwellings. It stands facing the Leck, between which and it intervenes a space, about seventy yards deep, that was once the school garden. Running from this building, at right angles with what now remains of the school-house, there was formerly a bobbin-mill connected with the stream, where wooden reels were made out of the alders which grow profusely in such ground as that surrounding Cowan's Bridge. Mr. Wilson adapted this mill to his purpose; there were school-rooms on the lower floor, and dormitories on the upper. The present cottage was occupied by the teachers' rooms, the dining-room and kitchens, and some smaller bed-rooms. On going into this building, I found one part, that nearest to the high road, converted into a poor kind of public-house, then to let, and having all the squalid appearance of a deserted place, which rendered it difficult to judge what it would look like when neatly kept up, the broken panes replaced in the windows, and the rough-cast (now cracked and discoloured) made white and whole. The other end forms a cottage, with the low ceilings and stone floors of a hundred years ago; the windows do not open freely and widely; and the passage upstairs, leading to the bed-rooms, is narrow and tortuous; altogether, smells would linger about the house, and damp cling to it. But sanitary matters were little understood thirty years ago; and it was a great thing to get a roomy building close to the high road, and not too far from the habitation of Mr. Wilson, the originator of the educational scheme. There was much need of such an institution; numbers of ill-paid clergymen hailed

the prospect with joy, and eagerly put down the names of their children as pupils when the establishment should be ready to receive them. Mr. Wilson was, no doubt, pleased by the impatience with which the realization of his idea was anticipated, and opened the school with less than a hundred pounds in hand, and, as far as I can make out, from seventy to eighty pupils.

Mr. Wilson felt, most probably, that the responsibility of the whole plan rested upon him. The payment made by the parents was barely enough for food and lodging; the subscriptions did not flow very freely into an untried scheme; and great economy was necessary in all the domestic arrangements. He determined to enforce this by frequent personal inspection; and his love of authority seems to have led to a great deal of unnecessary and irritating meddling with little matters. Yet, although there was economy in providing for the household, there does not appear to have been any parsimony. The meat, flour, milk, &c., were contracted for, but were of very fair quality; and the dietary, which has been shown to me in manuscript, was neither bad nor unwholesome; nor, on the whole, was it wanting in variety. Oatmeal porridge for breakfast; a piece of oat-cake for those who required luncheon; baked and boiled beef, and mutton, potato-pie, and plain homely puddings of different kinds for dinner. At five o'clock, bread and milk for the younger ones; and one piece of bread (this was the only time at which the food was limited) for the elder pupils, who sat up till a later meal of the same description. Mr. Wilson himself ordered in the food, and was anxious that it should be of good quality. But the cook, who had much of his confidence, and against whom for a long time no one durst utter a complaint, was careless, dirty, and wasteful. To some children oatmeal porridge is distasteful, and consequently unwholesome, even when properly made; at Cowan's Bridge School it was too often sent up, not merely burnt, but with offensive fragments of other substances discoverable in it. The beef, that should have been carefully salted before it was dressed, had often become tainted from neglect; and girls, who were schoolfellows with the Brontës, during the reign of the cook of whom I am speaking, tell me that the house seemed to be pervaded, morning, noon, and night, by the odour of rancid fat that steamed out of the oven in which much of their food was prepared. There was the same carelessness in making the puddings; one of those ordered was rice boiled in water, and eaten with a sauce of treacle

and sugar; but it was often uneatable, because the water had been taken out of the rain-tub, and was strongly impregnated with the dust lodging on the roof, whence it had trickled down into the old wooden cask, which also added its own flavour to that of the original rain water. The milk, too, was often “bingy,” to use a country expression for a kind of taint that is far worse than sourness, and suggests the idea that it is caused by want of cleanliness about the milk pans, rather than by the heat of the weather. On Saturdays, a kind of pie, or mixture of potatoes and meat, was served up, which was made of all the fragments accumulated during the week. Scraps of meat from a dirty and disorderly larder, could never be very appetizing; and, I believe, that this dinner was more loathed than any in the early days of Cowan’s Bridge School. One may fancy how repulsive such fare would be to children whose appetites were small, and who had been accustomed to food, far simpler perhaps, but prepared with a delicate cleanliness that made it both tempting and wholesome. Many a meal the little Brontës went without food, although craving with hunger. They were not strong when they came, having only just recovered from a complication of measles and hooping-cough; indeed, I suspect they had scarcely recovered; for there was some consultation on the part of the school authorities whether Maria and Elizabeth should be received or not, in July 1824. Mr. Brontë came again, in the September of that year, bringing with him Charlotte and Emily to be admitted as pupils.

It appears strange that Mr. Wilson should not have been informed by the teachers of the way in which the food was served up; but we must remember that the cook had been known for some time to the Wilson family, while the teachers were brought together for an entirely different work—that of education. They were expressly given to understand that such was their department; the buying in and management of the provisions rested with Mr. Wilson and the cook. The teachers would, of course, be unwilling to lay any complaints on the subject before him; and when he heard of them, his reply was to the effect that the children were to be trained up to regard higher things than dainty pampering of the appetite, and (apparently unconscious of the fact, that daily loathing and rejection of food is sure to undermine the health) he lectured them on the sin of caring over-much for carnal things.

There was another trial of health common to all the girls. The path from Cowan's Bridge to Tunstall Church, where Mr. Wilson preached, and where they all attended on the Sunday, is more than two miles in length, and goes sweeping along the rise and fall of the unsheltered country, in a way to make it a fresh and exhilarating walk in summer, but a bitter cold one in winter, especially to children whose thin blood flowed languidly in consequence of their half-starved condition. The church was not warmed, there being no means for this purpose. It stands in the midst of fields, and the damp mists must have gathered round the walls, and crept in at the windows. The girls took their cold dinner with them, and ate it between the services, in a chamber over the entrance, opening out of the former galleries. The arrangements for this day were peculiarly trying to delicate children, particularly to those who were spiritless, and longing for home, as poor Maria Brontë must have been. For her ill health was increasing; the old cough, the remains of the hooping-cough, lingered about her; she was far superior in mind to any of her play-fellows and companions, and was lonely amongst them from that very cause; and yet she had faults so annoying that she was in constant disgrace with her teachers, and an object of merciless dislike to one of them, who is depicted as "Miss Scatcherd" in "Jane Eyre," and whose real name I will be merciful enough not to disclose. I need hardly say, that Helen Burns is as exact a transcript of Maria Brontë as Charlotte's wonderful power of reproducing character could give. Her heart, to the latest day on which we met, still beat with unavailing indignation at the worrying and the cruelty to which her gentle, patient, dying sister had been subjected by this woman. Not a word of that part of "Jane Eyre" but is a literal repetition of scenes between the pupil and the teacher. Those who had been pupils at the same time knew who must have written the book, from the force with which Helen Burns' sufferings are described. They had, before that, recognized the description of the sweet dignity and benevolence of Miss Temple as only a just tribute to the merits of one whom all that knew her appear to hold in honour; but when Miss Scatcherd was held up to opprobrium they also recognized in the writer of "Jane Eyre" an unconsciously avenging sister of the sufferer.

One of these fellow-pupils of Charlotte and Maria Brontë's, among other statements even worse, gives me the following:—The dormitory in which

Maria slept was a long room, holding a row of narrow little beds on each side, occupied by the pupils; and at the end of this dormitory there was a small bed-chamber opening out of it, appropriated to the use of Miss Scatcherd. Maria's bed stood nearest to the door of this room. One morning, after she had become so seriously unwell as to have had a blister applied to her side (the sore from which was not perfectly healed), when the getting-up bell was heard, poor Maria moaned out that she was so ill, so very ill, she wished she might stop in bed; and some of the girls urged her to do so, and said they would explain it all to Miss Temple, the superintendent.[3] But Miss Scatcherd was close at hand, and her anger would have to be faced before Miss Temple's kind thoughtfulness could interfere; so the sick child began to dress, shivering with cold, as, without leaving her bed, she slowly put on her black worsted stockings over her thin white legs (my informant spoke as if she saw it yet, and her whole face flushed out undying indignation). Just then Miss Scatcherd issued from her room, and, without asking for a word of explanation from the sick and frightened girl, she took her by the arm, on the side to which the blister had been applied, and by one vigorous movement whirled her out into the middle of the floor, abusing her all the time for dirty and untidy habits. There she left her. My informant says, Maria hardly spoke, except to beg some of the more indignant girls to be calm; but, in slow, trembling movements, with many a pause, she went down stairs at last,—and was punished for being too late.

Any one may fancy how such an event as this would rankle in Charlotte's mind. I only wonder that she did not remonstrate against her father's decision to send her and Emily back to Cowan's Bridge, after Maria's and Elizabeth's deaths.[4] But frequently children are unconscious of the effect which some of their simple revelations would have in altering the opinions entertained by their friends of the persons placed around them. Besides, Charlotte's earnest vigorous mind saw, at an unusually early age, the immense importance of education, as furnishing her with tools which she had the strength and the will to wield, and she would be aware that the Cowan's Bridge education was, in many points, the best that her father could provide for her.

Before Maria Bronte's death, that low fever broke out, in the spring of 1825, which is spoken of in "Jane Eyre." Mr. Wilson was extremely alarmed at the first symptoms of this; his self-confidence was shaken; he did not understand what kind of illness it could be, that made the girls too dull and heavy to understand remonstrances, or be roused by texts and spiritual exhortation; but caused them to sink away into dull stupor, and half-unconscious listlessness. He went to a kind motherly woman, who had had some connection with the school—as laundress, I believe—and asked her to come and tell him what was the matter with them. She made herself ready, and drove with him in his gig. When she entered the school-room, she saw from twelve to fifteen girls lying about; some resting their aching heads on the table, others on the ground; all heavy-eyed, flushed, indifferent, and weary, with pains in every limb. Some peculiar odour, she says, made her recognise that they were sickening for "the fever;" and she told Mr. Wilson so, and that she could not stay there for fear of conveying the infection to her own children; but he half commanded, and half entreated her to remain and nurse them; and finally mounted his gig and drove away, while she was still urging that she must return to her own house, and to her domestic duties, for which she had provided no substitute. However, when she was left in this unceremonious manner, she determined to make the best of it; and a most efficient nurse she proved, although, as she says, it was a dreary time. Mr. Wilson supplied every thing ordered by the doctors of the best quality, and in the most liberal manner; he even sent for additional advice, in the person of his own brother-in-law, a very clever medical man in Kirby, with whom he had not been on good terms for some time previously; and it was this doctor who tasted and condemned the daily food of the girls by the expressive action of spitting out a portion which he had taken in order to taste it. About forty of the girls suffered from this fever, but none of them died at Cowan's Bridge, though one died at her own home, sinking under the state of health which followed it. None of the Brontës had the fever. But the same causes, which affected the health of the other pupils through typhus, told more slowly, but not less surely, upon their constitutions. The principal of these causes was the food.

The bad management of the cook was chiefly to be blamed for this; she was dismissed, and the woman who had been forced against her will to

serve as head nurse, took the place of housekeeper; and henceforward the food was so well prepared that no one could ever reasonably complain of it. Of course it cannot be expected that a new institution, comprising domestic and educational arrangements for nearly a hundred persons, should work quite smoothly at the beginning, and all this occurred during the first two years of the establishment. But Mr. Wilson seems to have had the unlucky gift of irritating even those to whom he meant kindly, and for whom he was making perpetual sacrifices of time and money, by never showing any respect for their independence of opinion and action. He had, too, so little knowledge of human nature as to imagine that, by constantly reminding the girls of their dependent position, and the fact that they were receiving their education from the charity of others, he could make them lowly and humble. Some of the more sensitive felt this treatment bitterly, and instead of being as grateful as they should have been for the real benefits they were obtaining, their mortified pride rose up from its fall a hundred-fold more strong. Painful impressions sink deep into the hearts of delicate and sickly children. What the healthy suffer from but momentarily, and then forget, those who are ailing brood over involuntarily, and remember long—perhaps with no resentment, but simply as a piece of suffering that has been stamped into their very life. The pictures, ideas, and conceptions of character received into the mind of the child of eight years old, were destined to be reproduced in fiery words a quarter of a century afterwards. She saw only one side, and that the unfavourable side of Mr. Wilson; but many of those who knew him, assure me of the wonderful fidelity with which his disagreeable qualities, his spiritual pride, his love of power, his ignorance of human nature and consequent want of tenderness are represented; while, at the same time, they regret that the delineation of these should have obliterated, as it were, nearly all that was noble and conscientious.

The recollections left of the four Brontë sisters at this period of their lives, on the minds of those who associated with them, are not very distinct. Wild, strong hearts, and powerful minds, were hidden under an enforced propriety and regularity of demeanour and expression, just as their faces had been concealed by their father, under his stiff, unchanging mask. Maria was delicate, unusually clever and thoughtful for her age, gentle, and untidy. Of her frequent disgrace from this last fault—of her sufferings, so patiently

borne—I have already spoken. The only glimpse we get of Elizabeth, through the few years of her short life, is contained in a letter which I have received from Miss “Temple.” “The second, Elizabeth, is the only one of the family of whom I have a vivid recollection, from her meeting with a somewhat alarming accident, in consequence of which I had her for some days and nights in my bed-room, not only for the sake of greater quiet, but that I might watch over her myself. Her head was severely cut, but she bore all the consequent suffering with exemplary patience, and by it won much upon my esteem. Of the two younger ones (if two there were) I have very slight recollections, save that one, a darling child, under five years of age, was quite the pet nursling of the school.” This last would be Emily. Charlotte was considered the most talkative of the sisters—a “bright, clever little child.” Her great friend was a certain “Mellany Hane” (so Mr. Brontë spells the name), a West Indian, whose brother paid for her schooling, and who had no remarkable talent except for music, which her brother’s circumstances forbade her to cultivate. She was “a hungry, good-natured, ordinary girl;” older than Charlotte, and ever ready to protect her from any petty tyranny or encroachments on the part of the elder girls. Charlotte always remembered her with affection and gratitude.

I have quoted the word “bright” in the account of Charlotte. I suspect that this year of 1825 was the last time it could ever be applied to her. In this spring, Maria became so rapidly worse that Mr. Brontë was sent for. He had not previously been aware of her illness, and the condition in which he found her was a terrible shock to him. He took her home by the Leeds coach, the girls crowding out into the road to follow her with their eyes over the bridge, past the cottages, and then out of sight for ever. She died a very few days after her arrival at home. Perhaps the news of her death, falling suddenly into the life of which her patient existence had formed a part, only a little week or so before, made those who remained at Cowan’s Bridge look with more anxiety on Elizabeth’s symptoms, which also turned out to be consumptive. She was sent home in charge of a confidential servant of the establishment; and she, too, died in the early summer of that year. Charlotte was thus suddenly called into the responsibilities of eldest sister in a motherless family. She remembered how anxiously her dear sister Maria had striven, in her grave earnest way, to be a tender helper and a

counsellor to them all; and the duties that now fell upon her seemed almost like a legacy from the gentle little sufferer so lately dead.

Both Charlotte and Emily returned to school after the Midsummer holidays in this fatal year. But before the next winter, it was thought desirable to advise their removal from school, as it was evident that the damp situation of the house at Cowan’s Bridge did not suit their health.

CHAPTER V.

For the reason just stated, the little girls were sent home in the autumn of 1825, when Charlotte was little more than nine years old.

About this time, an elderly woman of the village came to live as a servant at the parsonage. She remained there, as a member of the household, for thirty years; and from the length of her faithful service, and the attachment and respect which she inspired, is deserving of mention. Tabby[1] was a thorough specimen of a Yorkshire woman of her class, in dialect, in appearance, and in character. She abounded in strong practical sense and shrewdness. Her words were far from flattery; but she would spare no deeds in the cause of those whom she kindly regarded. She ruled the children pretty sharply; and yet never grudged a little extra trouble to provide them with such small treats as came within her power. In return, she claimed to be looked upon as a humble friend; and many years later, Miss Brontë told me she found it somewhat difficult to manage, as Tabby expected to be informed of all the family concerns, and yet had grown so deaf that what was repeated to her became known to whoever might be in or about the house. To obviate this publication of what it might be desirable to keep secret, Miss Brontë used to take her out for a walk on the solitary moors; where, when both were seated on a tuft of heather, in some high and lonely place, she could acquaint the old woman, at leisure, with all that she wanted to hear.

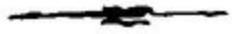
Tabby had lived in Haworth in the days when the packhorses went through once a week, with their tinkling bells and gay worsted adornment, carrying the produce of the country from Keighley over the hills to Colne and Burnley. What is more, she had known the “bottom,” or valley, in those primitive days when the fairies frequented the margin of the “beck” on moonlight nights, and had known folk who had seen them. But that was when there were no mills in the valleys; and when all the wool-spinning was done by hand in the farm-houses round. “It wur the factories as had driven ’em away,” she said. No doubt she had many a tale to tell of by-gone days of the country side; old ways of living, former inhabitants, decayed

gentry, who had melted away, and whose places knew them no more; family tragedies, and dark superstitious dooms; and in telling these things without the least consciousness that there might ever be anything requiring to be softened down, would give at full length the bare and simple details.

Miss Branwell instructed the children at regular hours in all she could teach, making her bed-chamber into their school-room. Their father was in the habit of relating to them any public news in which he felt an interest; and from the opinions of his strong and independent mind they would gather much food for thought; but I do not know whether he gave them any direct instruction. Charlotte's deep thoughtful spirit appears to have felt almost painfully the tender responsibility which rested upon her with reference to her remaining sisters. She was only eighteen months older than Emily; but Emily and Anne were simply companions and playmates, while Charlotte was motherly friend and guardian to both; and this loving assumption of duties beyond her years, made her feel considerably older than she really was.

Patrick Branwell, their only brother, was a boy of remarkable promise, and, in some ways, of extraordinary precocity of talent. Mr. Brontë's friends advised him to send his son to school; but, remembering both the strength of will of his own youth and his mode of employing it, he believed that Patrick was better at home, and that he himself could teach him well, as he had taught others before. So Patrick, or as his family called him, Branwell, remained at Haworth, working hard for some hours a day with his father; but, when the time of the latter was taken up with his parochial duties, the boy was thrown into chance companionship with the lads of the village—for youth will to youth, and boys will to boys.

Still, he was associated in many of his sisters' plays and amusements. These were mostly of a sedentary and intellectual nature. I have had a curious packet confided to me, containing an immense amount of manuscript, in an inconceivably small space; tales, dramas, poems, romances, written principally by Charlotte, in a hand which it is almost impossible to decipher without the aid of a magnifying glass. No description will give so good an idea of the extreme minuteness of the writing as the annexed fac-simile of a page.



FAC-SIMILE OF A PAGE OF M.S.


THE SECRET

CHAPTER THE I.ST

Among these papers there is a list of her works, which I copy, as a curious proof how early the rage for literary composition had seized upon her:—

Catalogue of My Books, with the Period of their Completion up to August 3rd, 1830.

Two romantic tales in one volume; viz., The Twelve Adventurers and the Adventures in Ireland, April 2nd, 1829.

The Search after Happiness, a Tale, Aug. 1st, 1829.

Leisure Hours, a Tale, and two Fragments, July 6th, 1829.

The Adventures of Edward de Crack, a Tale, Feb. 2nd, 1830.

The Adventures of Ernest Alembert, a Tale, May 26th, 1830.

An interesting Incident in the Lives of some of the most eminent Persons of the Age, a Tale, June 10th, 1830.

Tales of the Islanders, in four volumes. Contents of the 1st Vol.:—1. An Account of their Origin; 2. A Description of Vision Island; 3. Ratten's Attempt; 4. Lord Charles Wellesley and the Marquis of Douro's Adventure; completed June 31st, 1829. 2nd Vol.:—1. The School-rebellion; 2. The strange Incident in the Duke of Wellington's Life; 3. Tale to his Sons; 4. The Marquis of Douro and Lord Charles Wellesley's Tale to his little King and Queens; completed Dec. 2nd, 1829. 3rd Vol.:—1.The Duke of Wellington's Adventure in the Cavern; 2. The Duke of Wellington and the little King's and Queen's visit to the Horse-Guards; completed May 8th, 1830. 4th Vol.:—1. The three old Washerwomen of Strathfieldsaye; 2. Lord C. Wellesley's Tale to his Brother; completed July 30th, 1830.

Characters of Great Men of the Present Age, Dec. 17th, 1829.

The Young Men's Magazines, in Six Numbers, from August to December, the latter months' double number, completed December the 12th, 1829. General index to their contents:—1. A True Story; 2. Causes of the War; 3. A Song; 4. Conversations; 5. A True Story continued; 6. The Spirit of Cawdor; 7. Interior of a Pothouse, a Poem; 8. The Glass Town, a Song; 9. The Silver Cup, a Tale; 10. The Table and Vase in the Desert, a Song; 11. Conversations; 12. Scene on the Great Bridge; 13. Song of the Ancient Britons; 14. Scene in my Tun, a Tale; 15. An American Tale; 16. Lines

written on seeing the Garden of a Genius; 17. The Lay of the Glass Town; 18. The Swiss Artist, a Tale; 19. Lines on the transfer of this Magazine; 20. On the Same, by a different hand; 21. Chief Geni in Council; 22. Harvest in Spain; 23 . The Swiss Artist continued; 24. Conversations.

The Poetaster, a Drama, in 2 volumes, July 12th, 1830.

A Book of Rhymes, finished December 17th, 1829; Contents:—1. The Beauty of Nature; 2. A Short Poem; 3. Meditations while Journeying in a Canadian Forest; 4. A Song of an Exile; 5. On Seeing the Ruins of the Tower of Babel; 6. A Thing of 14 lines; 7. Lines written on the Bank of a River one fine Summer Evening; 8. Spring, a Song; 9. Autumn, a Song.

Miscellaneous Poems, finished May 30th, 1830. Contents:—1. The Churchyard; 2. Descriptions of the Duke of Wellington's Palace on the Pleasant Banks of the Lusiva; this article is a small prose tale or incident; 3. Pleasure; 4. Lines written on the Summit of a high Mountain of the North of England; 5. Winter; 6. Two Fragments, namely, 1st, The Vision; 2nd, A Short untitled Poem; The Evening Walk, a Poem, June 23rd, 1830.

Making in the whole twenty-two volumes.

C. BRONTË, *August* 3, 1830.

As each volume contains from sixty to a hundred pages, and the size of the page lithographed is rather less than the average, the amount of the whole seems very great, if we remember that it was all written in about fifteen months. So much for the quantity; the quality strikes me as of singular merit for a girl of thirteen or fourteen. Both as a specimen of her prose style at this time, and also as revealing something of the quiet domestic life led by these children, I take an extract from the introduction to "Tales of the Islanders," the title of one of their "Little Magazines:"—

"*June the* 31 st, 1829.

"The play of the 'Islanders' was formed in December, 1827, in the following manner. One night, about the time when the cold sleet and stormy fogs of November are succeeded by the snow-storms, and high piercing

night-winds of confirmed winter, we were all sitting round the warm blazing kitchen fire, having just concluded a quarrel with Tabby concerning the propriety of lighting a candle, from which she came off victorious, no candle having been produced. A long pause succeeded, which was at last broken by Branwell saying, in a lazy manner, ‘I don’t know what to do.’ This was echoed by Emily and Anne.

“Tabby. ‘Wha ya may go t’ bed.’

“Branwell. ‘I’d rather do any thing than that.’

“Charlotte. ‘Why are you so glum to-night, Tabby?

Oh! suppose we had each an island of our own.’

“Branwell. ‘If we had I would choose the Island of Man.’

“Charlotte. ‘And I would choose the Isle of Wight.’

“Emily. ‘The Isle of Arran for me.’

“Anne. ‘And mine should be Guernsey.’

“We then chose who should be chief men in our islands.[2] Branwell chose John Bull, Astley Cooper, and Leigh Hunt; Emily, Walter Scott, Mr. Lockhart, Johnny Lockhart; Anne, Michael Sadler, Lord Bentinck, Sir Henry Halford. I chose the Duke of Wellington and two sons, [3] Christopher North and Co., and Mr. Abernethy. Here our conversation was interrupted by the, to us, dismal sound of the clock striking seven, and we were summoned off to bed. The next day we added many others to our list of men, till we got almost all the chief men of the kingdom. After this, for a long time, nothing worth noticing occurred. In June, 1828, we erected a school on a fictitious island, which was to contain 1,000 children. The manner of the building was as follows. The Island was fifty miles in circumference, and certainly appeared more like the work of enchantment than any thing real,” &c.

Two or three things strike me much in this fragment; one is the graphic vividness with which the time of the year, the hour of the evening, the feeling of cold and darkness outside, the sound of the night-winds sweeping over the desolate snow-covered moors, coming nearer and nearer, and at last shaking the very door of the room where they were sitting—for it

opened out directly on that bleak, wide expanse—is contrasted with the glow, and busy brightness of the cheerful kitchen where these remarkable children are grouped. Tabby moves about in her quaint country-dress, frugal, peremptory, prone to find fault pretty sharply, yet allowing no one else to blame her children, we may feel sure. Another noticeable fact is the intelligent partisanship with which they choose their great men, who are almost all stanch Tories of the time. Moreover, they do not confine themselves to local heroes; their range of choice has been widened by hearing much of what is not usually considered to interest children. Little Anne, aged scarcely eight, picks out the politicians of the day for her chief men.

There is another scrap of paper, in this all but illegible handwriting, written about this time, and which gives some idea of the sources of their opinions.

The History of the Year 1829.

“Once Papa lent my sister Maria a book. It was an old geography-book; she wrote on its blank leaf, ‘Papa lent me this book.’ This book is a hundred and twenty years old; it is at this moment lying before me. While I write this I am in the kitchen of the Parsonage, Haworth; Tabby, the servant, is washing up the breakfast-things, and Anne, my youngest sister (Maria was my eldest), is kneeling on a chair, looking at some cakes which Tabby has been baking for us. Emily is in the parlor, brushing the carpet. Papa and Branwell are gone to Keighley. Aunt is up-stairs in her room, and I am sitting by the table writing this in the kitchen. Keighley is a small town four miles from here. Papa and Branwell are gone for the newspaper, the ‘Leeds Intelligencer,’ a most excellent Tory newspaper, edited by Mr. Wood, and the proprietor, Mr. Henneman. We take two and see three newspapers a week. We take the ‘Leeds Intelligencer,’ Tory, and the ‘Leeds Mercury,’ Whig, edited by Mr. Baines, and his brother, son-in-law, and his two sons, Edward and Talbot. We see the ‘John Bull;’ it is a high Tory, very violent. Mr. Driver lends us it, as likewise ‘Blackwood’s Magazine,’[4] the most able periodical there is. The Editor is Mr. Christopher North, an old man seventy-four years of age; the 1st of April is his birth-day; his company are

Timothy Tickler, Morgan O‘Doherty, Macrabin Mordecai, Mullion, Warnell, and James Hogg, a man of most extraordinary genius, a Scottish shepherd. Our plays were established; ‘Young Men,‘ June, 1826; ‘Our Fellows,’ July, 1827; ‘Islanders,’ December, 1827. These are our three great plays, that are not kept secret. Emily’s and my best plays[d] were established the 1st of December, 1827; the others March, 1828. Best plays mean secret plays, they are very nice ones. All our plays are very strange ones. Their nature I need not write on paper, for I think I shall always remember them. The ‘Young Men’s’ play took its rise from some wooden soldiers Branwell had; ‘Our Fellows’ from ‘*Æ*sop’s Fables’; and the ‘Islanders’ from several events which happened. I will sketch out the origin of our plays more explicitly if I can. First, ‘Young Men.’ Papa brought Branwell some wooden soldiers at Leeds; when Papa came home it was night, and we were in bed, so next morning Branwell came to our door with a box of soldiers. Emily and I jumped out of bed, and I snatched up one and exclaimed, ‘This is the Duke of Wellington! This shall be the Duke!’ When I had said this Emily likewise took one up and said it should be hers; when Anne came down, she said one should be hers. Mine was the prettiest of the whole, and the tallest, and the most perfect in every part. Emily’s was a grave looking fellow, and we called him ‘Gravey’ Anne’s was a queer little thing, much like herself, and we called him ‘Waiting-boy.’ Branwell chose his, and called him ‘Buonaparte.’ ”

The foregoing extract shows something of the kind of reading in which the little Brontës were interested; but their desire for knowledge must have been excited in many directions, for I find a “list of painters whose works I wish to see,” drawn up by Charlotte Brontë when she was scarcely thirteen: —

“Guido Reni, Julio Romano, Titian, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Coreggio, Annibal Carracci, Leonardo da Vinci, Fra Bartolomeo, Carlo Cignani, Vandyke, Rubens, Bartolomeo Ramerghi.”

Here is this little girl, in a remote Yorkshire parsonage, who has probably never seen anything worthy the name of a painting in her life, studying the names and characteristics of the great old Italian and Flemish masters, whose works she longs to see sometime, in the dim future that lies before

her! There is a paper remaining which contains minute studies of, and criticisms upon, the engravings in "Friendship's Offering for 1829;"[5] showing how she had early formed those habits of close observation, and patient analysis of cause and effect, which served so well in after-life as handmaids to her genius.

The way in which Mr. Brontë made his children sympathize with him in his great interest in politics, must have done much to lift them above the chances of their minds being limited or tainted by petty local gossip. I take the only other remaining personal fragment out of "Tales of the Islanders;" it is a sort of apology, contained in the introduction to the second volume, for their not having been continued before; the writers had been for a long time too busy, and lately too much absorbed in politics.

"Parliament was opened, and the great Catholic question[6] was brought forward, and the Duke's measures were disclosed, and all was slander, violence, party-spirit, and confusion. Oh, those six months, from the time of the King's speech to the end! Nobody could write, think, or speak on any subject but the Catholic question, and the Duke of Wellington, and Mr. Peel. I remember the day when the Intelligence Extraordinary came with Mr. Peel's speech in it, containing the terms on which the Catholics were to be let in! With what eagerness papa tore off the cover, and how we all gathered round him, and with what breathless anxiety we listened, as one by one they were disclosed, and explained, and argued upon so ably and so well; and then when it was all out, how aunt said that she thought it was excellent, and that the Catholics could do no harm with such good security. I remember also the doubts as to whether it would pass the House of Lords, and the prophecies that it would not; and when the paper came which was to decide the question, the anxiety was almost dreadful with which we listened to the whole affair: the opening of the doors; the hush; the royal dukes in their robes, and the great duke in green sash and waistcoat; the rising of all the peeresses when he rose; the reading of his speech—papa saying that his words were like precious gold; and lastly, the majority of one to four (sic) in favor of the Bill. But this is a digression." &c. &c.

This must have been written when she was between thirteen and fourteen.

It will be interesting to some of my readers to know what was the character of her purely imaginative writing at this period. While her description of any real occurrence is, as we have seen, homely, graphic, and forcible, when she gives way to her powers of creation, her fancy and her language alike run riot, sometimes to the very borders of apparent delirium. Of this wild weird writing, a single example will suffice. It is a letter to the editor of one of the “Little Magazines.”

SIR,—It is well known that the Genii have declared that unless they perform certain arduous duties every year, of a mysterious nature, all the worlds in the firmament will be burnt up, and gathered together in one mighty globe, which will roll in solitary grandeur through the vast wilderness of space, inhabited only by the four high princes of the Genii, till time shall be succeeded by Eternity; and the impudence of this is only to be paralleled by another of their assertions, namely, ‘that by their magic might they can reduce the world to a desert, the purest waters to streams of livid poison, and the clearest lakes to stagnant waters, the pestilential vapours of which shall slay all living creatures, except the blood-thirsty beast of the forest, and the ravenous bird of the rock. But that in the midst of this desolation the palace of the Chief Geni shall rise sparkling in the wilderness, and the horrible howl of their war cry shall spread over the land at morning, at noontide and night; but that they shall have their annual feast over the bones of the dead, and shall yearly rejoice with the joy of victors. I think, sir, that the horrible wickedness of this needs no remark, and therefore I haste to subscribe myself, &c.

“*July* 14, 1829.”

It is not unlikely that the foregoing letter may have had some allegorical or political reference, invisible to our eyes, but very clear to the bright little minds for whom it was intended. Politics were evidently their grand interest; the Duke of Wellington their demi-god. All that related to him belonged to the heroic age. Did Charlotte want a knight-errant, or a devoted lover, the Marquis Douro, or Lord Charles Wellesley, came ready to her hand. There is hardly one of her prose writings at this time in which they

are not the principal personages, and in which their “august father” does not appear as a sort of Jupiter Tonans, or Deus ex Machinâ.

As one evidence how Wellesley haunted her imagination, I copy out a few of the titles to her papers in the various magazines.

“Liffey Castle,” a Tale by Lord C. Wellesley.

“Lines to the River Aragua,” by the Marquis of Douro.

“An Extraordinary Dream,” by Lord C. Wellesley.

“The Green Dwarf, a Tale of the Perfect Tense,” by the Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley.

“Strange Events,” by Lord C. A. F. Wellesley.

Life in an isolated village, or a lonely country house, presents many little occurrences which sink into the mind of childhood, there to be brooded over. No other event may have happened, or be likely to happen, for days, to push this aside, before it has assumed a vague and mysterious importance. Thus, children leading a secluded life are often thoughtful and dreamy: the impressions made upon them by the world without—the unusual sights of earth and sky—the accidental meetings with strange faces and figures—(rare occurrences in those out-of-the-way places)—are sometimes magnified by them into things so deeply significant as to be almost supernatural. This peculiarity I perceive very strongly in Charlotte’s writings at this time. Indeed, under the circumstances, it is no peculiarity. It has been common to all, from the Chaldean shepherds, the “lonely herdsman stretched on the green sward through half a summer’s day”—the solitary monk—to all whose impressions from without have had time to grow and vivify in the imagination, till they have been received as actual personifications, or supernatural visions, to doubt which would be blasphemy.

To counterbalance this tendency in Charlotte, was the strong common sense natural to her, and daily called into exercise by the requirements of her practical life. Her duties were not merely to learn her lessons, to read a certain quantity, to gain certain ideas: she had, besides, to brush rooms, to run errands, to help with the simpler forms of cooking, to be by turns play-fellow and monitress to her younger sisters and brother, to make and to

mend, and to study economy under her careful aunt. Thus we see that, while her imagination received powerful impressions, her excellent understanding had full power to rectify them before her fancies became realities. On a scrap of paper, she has written down the following relation:—

"*June* 22, 1830, 6 o'clock P.M.

Haworth, near Bradford.

"The following strange occurrence happened on the 22nd of June, 1830:—At that time papa was very ill, confined to his bed, and so weak that he could not rise without assistance. Tabby and I were alone in the kitchen, about half-past nine, ante meridian. Suddenly we heard a knock at the door; Tabby rose and opened it. An old man appeared, standing without, who accosted her thus:—

"*Old* Man.—'Does the parson live here?'

"Tabby—'Yes.'

"*Old* Man.—'I wish to see him.'

"Tabby.—'He is poorly in bed.'

"*Old* Man.—'I have a message for him.'

"Tabby.—'Who from?'

"*Old* Man.—'From the Lord.'

"Tabby.—'Who?'

"*Old* Man.—'The Lord. He desires me to say that the bridegroom is coming, and that we must prepare to meet him; that the cords are about to be loosed, and the golden bowl broken; the pitcher broken at the fountain.'

"Here he concluded his discourse, and abruptly went his way. As Tabby closed the door, I asked her if she knew him. Her reply was, that she had never seen him before, nor any one like him. Though I am fully persuaded that he was some fanatical enthusiast, well meaning, but utterly ignorant of true piety; yet I could not forbear weeping at his words, spoken so unexpectedly at that particular period."

Though the date of the following poem is a little uncertain, it may be most convenient to introduce it here. It must have been written before 1833, but how much earlier there are no means of determining. I give it as a specimen of the remarkable poetical talent shown in the various diminutive writings of this time; at least, in all of them which I have been able to read.

THE WOUNDED STAG.

Passing amid the deepest shade
Of the wood's sombre heart,
Last night I saw a wounded deer
Laid lonely and apart.

Such light as pierced the crowded boughs
(Light scattered, scant and dim,)
Passed through the fern that form'd his couch
And centred full on him.

Pain trembled in his weary limbs,
Pain filled his patient eye,
Pain crushed amid the shadowy fern
His branchy crown did lie.

Where were his comrades? where his mate?
All from his death-bed gone!
And he, thus struck and desolate,
Suffered and bled alone.

Did he feel what a man might feel
Friend-left, and sore distrest?
Did Pain's keen dart, and Grief 's sharp sting
Strive in his mangled breast?

Did longing for affection lost
Barb every deadly dart;
Love unrepaid, and Faith betrayed,
Did these torment his heart?

No! leave to man his proper doom!
These are the pangs that rise
Around the bed of state and gloom,
Where Adam’s offspring dies!

CHAPTER VI.

This is perhaps a fitting time to give some personal description of Miss Brontë. In 1831, she was a quiet, thoughtful girl, of nearly fifteen years of age, very small in figure—"stunted" was the word she applied to herself,—but as her limbs and head were in just proportion to the slight, fragile body, no word in ever so slight a degree suggestive of deformity could properly be applied to her; with soft, thick, brown hair, and peculiar eyes, of which I find it difficult to give a description, as they appeared to me in her later life. They were large, and well shaped; their colour a reddish brown; but if the iris was closely examined, it appeared to be composed of a great variety of tints. The usual expression was of quiet, listening intelligence; but now and then, on some just occasion for vivid interest or wholesome indignation, a light would shine out, as if some spiritual lamp had been kindled, which glowed behind those expressive orbs. I never saw the like in any other human creature. As for the rest of her features, they were plain, large, and ill set; but, unless you began to catalogue them, you were hardly aware of the fact, for the eyes and power of the countenance overbalanced every physical defect; the crooked mouth and the large nose were forgotten, and the whole face arrested the attention, and presently attracted all those whom she herself would have cared to attract. Her hands and feet were the smallest I ever saw; when one of the former was placed in mine, it was like the soft touch of a bird in the middle of my palm. The delicate long fingers had a peculiar fineness of sensation, which was one reason why all her handiwork, of whatever kind—writing, sewing, knitting—was so clear in its minuteness. She was remarkably neat in her whole personal attire; but she was dainty as to the fit of her shoes and gloves.

I can well imagine that the grave serious composure, which, when I knew her, gave her face the dignity of an old Venetian portrait, was no acquisition of later years, but dated from that early age when she found herself in the position of an elder sister to motherless children. But in a girl only just entered on her teens, such an expression would be called, (to use a country phrase) "old-fashioned"; and in 1831, the period of which I now write, we must think of her as a little, set, antiquated girl, very quiet in manners, and

very quaint in dress; for, besides the influence exerted by her father's ideas concerning the simplicity of attire befitting the wife and daughters of a country clergyman (as evinced in his destruction of the coloured boots and the silk gown), her aunt, on whom the duty of dressing her nieces principally devolved, had never been in society since she left Penzance, eight or nine years before, and the Penzance fashions of that day were still dear to her heart.

In January, 1831, Charlotte was sent to school again. This time she went as a pupil to the Miss Woolers, who lived at Roe Head,[1] a cheerful roomy country house, standing a little apart in a field, on the right of the road from Leeds to Huddersfield. Two tiers of old fashioned semi-circular bow windows run from basement to roof of Roe Head; and look down upon a long green slope of pasture-land, ending in the pleasant woods of Kirklees, Sir George Armitage's park. Although Roe Head and Haworth are not twenty miles apart, the aspect of the country is as totally dissimilar as if they enjoyed a different climate. The soft curving and heaving landscape around the former gives a stranger the idea of cheerful airiness on the heights, and of sunny warmth in the broad green valleys below. It is just such a neighbourhood as the monks loved, and traces of the old Plantagenet times are to be met with everywhere, side by side with the manufacturing interests of the West Riding of today. Here, the park of Kirklees, full of sunny glades, speckled with black shadows of immemorial yew-trees; the grey pile of building, formerly a "House of professed Ladies;" the mouldering stone in the depth of the wood, under which Robin Hood is said to lie; close outside the Park, an old stone gabled house now a roadside inn, but which bears the name of the "Three Nuns," and has a pictured sign to correspond. This quaint old inn is frequented by fustian-dressed mill-hands from the neighbouring worsted factories, which strew the high road from Leeds to Huddersfield, and form the centres round which future villages gather. Such are the contrasts of modes of living, and of times and seasons, brought before the traveller on the great roads that traverse the West Riding. In no other part of England, I fancy, are the centuries brought into such close, strange contact as in the district in which Roe Head is situated. Within a walk from Miss Wooler's house—on the left of the road, coming from Leeds—lie the remains of Howley Hall, now the property of Lord

Cardigan, but formerly belonging to a branch of the Saviles. Near to it is Lady Anne's well; "Lady Anne," according to tradition, having been worried and eaten by wolves as she sat at the well, to which the indigo-dyed factory people from Birstall and Batley woollen mills yet repair on Palm Sunday, when the waters possess remarkable medicinal efficacy; and it is still believed that they assume a strange variety of colours at six o'clock in the morning on that day.

All round the lands held by the farmer who lives in the remains of Howley Hall, are stone houses of to-day, occupied by the people who are making their living and their fortunes by the woollen mills that encroach upon, and shoulder out the proprietors of the ancient halls. These are to be seen in every direction, picturesque, many-gabled, with heavy stone carvings of coats of arms for heraldic ornament; belonging to decayed families, from whose ancestral lands field after field has been shorn away, by the urgency of rich manufacturers pressing hard upon necessity.

A smoky atmosphere surrounds these old dwellings of former Yorkshire squires, and blights and blackens the ancient trees that overshadow them; cinder-paths lead up to them; the ground round about is sold for building upon; but still the neighbours, though they subsist by a different state of things, remember that their forefathers lived in agricultural dependence upon the owners of these halls; and treasure up the traditions connected with the stately households that existed centuries ago. Take Oakwell Hall, for instance. It stands in a rough-looking pasture-field, about a quarter of a mile from the high road. It is but that distance from the busy whirr of the steam-engines employed in the woollen mills of Birstall; and if you walk to it from Birstall Station about meal-time, you encounter strings of mill-hands, blue with woollen dye, and cranching in hungry haste over the cinder-paths bordering the high road. Turning off from this to the right, you ascend through an old pasture-field, and enter a short by-road, called the "Bloody Lane"—a walk haunted by the ghost of a certain Captain Batt, the reprobate proprietor of an old hall close by, in the days of the Stuarts. From the "Bloody Lane," overshadowed by trees, you come into the rough-looking field in which Oakwell Hall is situated. It is known in the neighbourhood to be the place described as "Field Head," Shirley's residence. The enclosure in front, half court, half garden; the panelled hall,

with the gallery opening into the bed chambers running round; the barbarous peach-coloured drawing-room; the bright look-out through the garden-door upon the grassy lawns and terraces behind, where the soft-hued pigeons still love to coo and strut in the sun,—are described in “Shirley.” The scenery of that fiction lies close around; the real events which suggested it took place in the immediate neighbourhood.

They show a bloody footprint in a bedchamber of Oakwell Hall, and tell a story connected with it, and with the lane by which the house is approached. Captain Batt was believed to be far away; his family was at Oakwell; when in the dusk, one winter evening, he came stalking along the lane, and through the hall, and up the stairs, into his own room, where he vanished. He had been killed in a duel in London that very same afternoon of December 9, 1684.

The stones of the Hall formed part of the more ancient vicarage, which an ancestor of Captain Batt’s had seized in the troublous times for property which succeeded the Reformation. This Henry Batt possessed himself of houses and money without scruple; and, at last, stole the great bell of Birstall Church, for which sacrilegious theft a fine was imposed on the land, and has to be paid by the owner of the Hall to this day.

But the possession of the Oakwell property passed out of the hands of the Batts at the beginning of the last century; collateral descendants succeeded, and left this picturesque trace of their having been. In the great hall hangs a mighty pair of stag’s horns, and dependent from them a printed card, recording the fact that, on the 1st of September, 1763, there was a great hunting-match, when this stag was slain; and that fourteen gentlemen shared in the chase, and dined on the spoil in that hall, along with Fairfax Fearneley, Esq., the owner. The fourteen names are given, doubtless “mighty men of yore;” but, among them all, Sir Fletcher Norton, Attorney-General, and Major-General Birch were the only ones with which I had any association in 1855. Passing on from Oakwell there lie houses right and left, which were well known to Miss Brontë when she lived at Roe Head, as the hospitable homes of some of her schoolfellows. Lanes branch off to heaths and commons on the higher ground, which formed pleasant walks on holidays, and then comes the white gate into the field path leading to Roe Head itself.

One of the bow-windowed rooms on the ground floor, with the pleasant look-out I have described, was the drawing-room; the other was the school-room. The dining-room was on one side of the door, and faced the road.

The number of pupils ranged from seven to ten, during the two years Miss Brontë was there; and as they did not require the whole of the house for their accommodation, the third story was unoccupied, except by the ghostly idea of a lady, whose rustling silk gown was sometimes heard by the listeners at the foot of the second flight of stairs.

The kind motherly nature of Miss Wooler, and the small number of the girls, made the establishment more like a private family than a school. Moreover, she was a native of the district immediately surrounding Roe Head, as were the majority of her pupils. Most likely Charlotte Brontë, in coming from Haworth, came the greatest distance of all. E.'s home was five miles away;[2] two other dear friends (the Rose and Jessie Yorke of "Shirley")[3] lived still nearer; two or three came from Huddersfield; one or two from Leeds.

I shall now quote, from a valuable letter which I have received from Mary, one of these early friends; distinct and graphic in expression, as becomes a cherished associate of Charlotte Brontë's. The time referred to is her first appearance at Roe Head, on January 19th, 1831.

"I first saw her coming out of a covered cart, in very old-fashioned clothes, and looking very cold and miserable. She was coming to school at Miss Wooler's. When she appeared in the schoolroom, her dress was changed, but just as old. She looked a little old woman, so short-sighted that she always appeared to be seeking something, and moving her head from side to side to catch a sight of it. She was very shy and nervous, and spoke with a strong Irish accent. When a book was given her, she dropped her head over it till her nose nearly touched it, and when she was told to hold her head up, up went the book after it, still close to her nose, so that it was not possible to help laughing."

This was the first impression she made upon one of those whose dear and valued friend she was to become in after-life. Another of the girls recalls her first sight of Charlotte, on the day she came, standing by the school-

room window, looking out on the snowy landscape, and crying, while all the rest were at play. E. was younger than she, and her tender heart was touched by the apparently desolate condition in which she found the oddly-dressed, odd-looking little girl that winter morning, as “sick for home she stood in tears,” in a new strange place, among new strange people. Any over-demonstrative kindness would have scared the wild little maiden from Haworth; but E. (who is shadowed forth in the Caroline Helstone of “Shirley”) managed to win confidence, and was allowed to give sympathy.

To quote again from “Mary’s” letter:—

“We thought her very ignorant, for she had never learnt grammar at all, and very little geography.”

This account of her partial ignorance is confirmed by her other schoolfellows. But Miss Wooler was a lady of remarkable intelligence and of delicate tender sympathy. She gave a proof of this in her first treatment of Charlotte. The little girl was well read but not well grounded. Miss Wooler took her aside and told her she was afraid that she must place her in the second class for some time, till she could overtake the girls of her own age in their knowledge of grammar, &c.; but poor Charlotte received this announcement by so sad a fit of crying, that Miss Wooler’s kind heart was softened, and she wisely perceived that, with such a girl, it would be better to place her in the first class, and allow her to make up by private study in those branches where she was deficient.

“She would confound us by knowing things that were out of our range altogether. She was acquainted with most of the short pieces of poetry that we had to learn by heart; would tell us the authors, the poems they were taken from, and sometimes repeat a page or two, and tell us the plot. She had a habit of writing in italics (printing characters) and said she had learnt it by writing in their magazine. They brought out a magazine once a month and wished it to look as like print as possible. She told us a tale out of it. No one wrote in it, and no one read it, but herself, her brother, and two sisters. She promised to show me some of these magazines; but retracted it afterwards, and would never be persuaded to do so. In our play hours she sate, or stood still, with a book, if possible. Some of us once urged her to be on our side in a game at ball. She said she had never played, and could not

play. We made her try, but soon found that she could not see the ball, so we put her out. She took all our proceedings with pliable indifference, and always seemed to need a previous resolution to say ‘No’ to anything. She used to go and stand under the trees in the play-ground, and say it was pleasanter. She endeavoured to explain this, pointing out the shadows, the peeps of sky, &c. We understood but little of it. She said that at Cowan Bridge she used to stand in the burn, on a stone to watch the water flow by I told her she should have gone fishing; she said she never wanted. She always showed physical feebleness in everything. She ate no animal food at school. It was about this time I told her she was very ugly. Some years afterwards, I told her I thought I had been very impertinent. She replied, ‘You did me a great deal of good, Polly, so don’t repent of it.’ She used to draw much better, and more quickly, than anything we had seen before, and knew much about celebrated pictures and painters. Whenever an opportunity offered of examining a picture or cut of any kind, she went over it piecemeal, with her eyes close to the paper, looking so long that we used to ask her ‘what she saw in it.’ She could always see plenty, and explained it very well. She made poetry and drawing, at least exceedingly interesting to me; and then I got the habit, which I have yet, of referring mentally to her opinion on all matters of that kind, along with many more, resolving to describe such and such things to her, until I start at the recollection that I never shall.”

To feel the full force of this last sentence—to show how steady and vivid was the impression which Miss Brontë made on those fitted to appreciate her—I must mention that the writer of this letter, dated January 18th, 1856, in which she thus speaks of constantly referring to Charlotte’s opinion, has never seen her for eleven years, nearly all of which have been passed among strange scenes, in a new continent, at the antipodes.

“We used to be furious politicians, as one could hardly help being in 1832. She knew the names of the two ministries; the one that resigned, and the one that succeeded and passed the Reform Bill.[4] She worshipped the Duke of Wellington, but said that Sir Robert Peel was not to be trusted; he did not act from principle like the rest, but from expediency. I, being of the furious radical party, told her ‘how could any of them trust one another; they were all of them rascals!’ Then she would launch out into praises of

the Duke of Wellington, referring to his actions; which I could not contradict, as I knew nothing about him. She said she had taken an interest in politics ever since she was five years old. She did not get her opinions from her father—that is, not directly—but from the papers, &c., he preferred."

In illustration of the truth of this, I may give an extract from a letter to her brother, written from Roe Head, May 17th, 1832:—"Lately I had begun to think that I had lost all the interest which I used formerly to take in politics; but the extreme pleasure I felt at the news of the Reform Bill's being thrown out by the House of Lords, and of the expulsion, or resignation, of Earl Grey, &c., convinced me that I have not as yet lost all my penchant for politics. I am extremely glad that aunt has consented to take in 'Frazer's Magazine;'[5] for, though I know from your description of its general contents it will be rather uninteresting when compared with 'Blackwood,' still it will be better than remaining the whole year without being able to obtain a sight of any periodical whatever; and such would assuredly be our case, as, in the little wild moorland village where we reside, there would be no possibility of borrowing a work of that description from a circulating library. I hope with you that the present delightful weather may contribute to the perfect restoration of our dear papa's health; and that it may give aunt pleasant reminiscences of the salubrious climate of her native place," &c.

To return to Mary's letter. "She used to speak of her two elder sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, who died at Cowan Bridge. I used to believe them to have been wonders of talent and kindness. She told me, early one morning, that she had just been dreaming; she had been told that she was wanted in the drawing-room, and it was Maria and Elizabeth. I was eager for her to go on, and when she said there was no more, I said, 'but go on! Make it out! I know you can.' She said she would not; she wished she had not dreamed, for it did not go on nicely; they were changed; they had forgotten what they used to care for. They were very fashionably dressed, and began criticising the room, &c.

"This habit of 'making out' interests for themselves, that most children get who have none in actual life, was very strong in her. The whole family used to 'make out' histories, and invent characters and events. I told her

sometimes they were like growing potatoes in a cellar. She said, sadly, ‘Yes! I know we are!’ ”

What I have heard of her school days from other sources, confirms the accuracy of the details in this remarkable letter. She was an indefatigable student: constantly reading and learning; with a strong conviction of the necessity and value of education, very unusual in a girl of fifteen. She never lost a moment of time, and seemed almost to grudge the necessary leisure for relaxation and play-hours, which might be partly accounted for by the awkwardness in all games occasioned by her shortness of sight. Yet, in spite of these unsociable habits, she was a great favourite with her school-fellows. She was always ready to try and do what they wished, though not sorry when they called her awkward, and left her out of their sports. Then, at night, she was an invaluable story-teller, frightening them almost out of their wits as they lay in bed. On one occasion the effect was such that she was led to scream out loud, and Miss Wooler, coming upstairs, found that one of the listeners had been seized with violent palpitations, in consequence of the excitement produced by Charlotte’s story

Her indefatigable craving for knowledge tempted Miss Wooler on into setting her longer and longer tasks of reading for examination; and towards the end of the two years that she remained as a pupil at Roe Head, she received her first bad mark for an imperfect lesson. She had had a great quantity of Blair’s “Lectures on Belles-Lettres” [e] to read; and she could not answer some of the questions upon it: Charlotte Brontë had a bad mark. Miss Wooler was sorry, and regretted that she had over-tasked so willing a pupil. Charlotte cried bitterly. But her school-fellows were more than sorry —they were indignant. They declared that the infliction of ever so slight a punishment on Charlotte Brontë was unjust—for who had tried to do her duty like her?—and testified their feeling in a variety of ways, until Miss Wooler, who was in reality only too willing to pass over her good pupil’s first fault, withdrew the bad mark, and the girls all returned to their allegiance except “Mary,” who took her own way during the week or two that remained of the half-year, choosing to consider Miss Wooler’s injustice, in giving Charlotte Brontë a longer task than she could possibly prepare, as a reason for no longer obeying any of the school regulations.

The number of pupils was so small that the attendance to certain subjects at particular hours, common in larger schools, was not rigidly enforced. When the girls were ready with their lessons, they came to Miss Wooler to say them. She had a remarkable knack of making them feel interested in whatever they had to learn. They set to their studies, not as to tasks or duties to be got through, but with a healthy desire and thirst for knowledge, of which she had managed to make them perceive the relishing savour. They did not leave off reading and learning as soon as the compulsory pressure of school was taken away. They had been taught to think, to analyze, to reject, to appreciate. Charlotte Brontë was happy in the choice made for her of the second school to which she was sent. There was a robust freedom in the out-of-doors life of her companions. They played at merry games in the fields round the house: on Saturday half-holidays they went on long scrambling walks down mysterious shady lanes, then climbing the uplands, and thus gaining extensive views over the country, about which so much had to be told, both of its past and present history.

Miss Wooler must have had in great perfection the French art, “conter,” to judge from her pupil’s recollections of the tales she related during these long walks, of this old house, or that new mill, and of the states of society consequent on the changes involved by the suggestive dates of either building. She remembered the times when watchers or wakeners in the night heard the distant word of command, and the measured tramp of thousands of sad desperate men receiving a surreptitious military training, in preparation for some great day which they saw in their visions, when right should struggle with might and come off victorious: when the people of England, represented by the workers of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Notting-hamshire, should make their voice heard in a terrible slogan, since their true and pitiful complaints could find no hearing in Parliament. We forget, now-a-days, so rapid have been the changes for the better, how cruel was the condition of numbers of laborers at the close of the great Peninsular war. The half-ludicrous nature of some of their grievances has lingered on in tradition; the real intensity of their sufferings is now forgotten. They were maddened and desperate; and the country, in the opinion of many, seemed to be on the verge of a precipice, from which it was only saved by the prompt and resolute decision of a few in authority. Miss Wooler spoke

of those times; of the mysterious nightly drillings; of thousands on lonely moors; of the muttered threats of individuals too closely pressed upon by necessity to be prudent; of the overt acts, in which the burning of Cartwright's mill[6] took a prominent place; and these things sank deep into the mind of one, at least, among her hearers.

Mr. Cartwright was the owner of a factory called Rawfolds, in Liversedge, not beyond the distance of a walk from Roe Head. He had dared to employ machinery for the dressing of woollen cloth, which was an unpopular measure in 1812, when many other circumstances conspired to make the condition of the mill-hands unbearable from the pressure of starvation and misery. Mr. Cartwright was a very remarkable man, having, as I have been told, some foreign blood in him, the traces of which were very apparent in his tall figure, dark eyes and complexion, and singular, though gentlemanly bearing. At any rate, he had been much abroad, and spoke French well, of itself a suspicious circumstance to the bigoted nationality of those days. Altogether he was an unpopular man, even before he took the last step of employing shears, instead of hands, to dress his wool. He was quite aware of his unpopularity, and of the probable consequences. He had his mill prepared for an assault. He took up his lodgings in it; and the doors were strongly barricaded at night. On every step of the stairs there was placed a roller, spiked with barbed points all round, so as to impede the ascent of the rioters, if they succeeded in forcing the doors. On the night of Saturday the 11th of April, 1812, the assault was made. Some hundreds of starving cloth-dressers assembled in the very field near Kirklees that sloped down from the house which Miss Wooler afterwards inhabited, and were armed by their leaders with pistols, hatchets, and bludgeons, many of which had been extorted by the nightly bands that prowled about the country, from such inhabitants of lonely houses as had provided themselves with these means of self-defence. The silent sullen multitude marched in the dead of that spring-night to Rawfolds, and giving tongue with a great shout, roused Mr. Cartwright up to the knowledge that the long-expected attack was come. He was within walls, it is true; but against the fury of hundreds he had only four of his own workmen and five soldiers to assist him. These ten men, however, managed to keep up such a vigorous and well-directed fire of musketry that they defeated all the

desperate attempts of the multitude outside to break down the doors, and force a way into the mill; and, after a conflict of twenty minutes, during which two of the assailants were killed and several wounded, they withdrew in confusion, leaving Mr. Cartwright master of the field, but so dizzy and exhausted, now the peril was past, that he forgot the nature of his defences, and injured his leg rather seriously by one of the spiked rollers, in attempting to go up his own staircase. His dwelling was near the factory. Some of the rioters vowed that if he did not give in, they would leave this, and go to his house, and murder his wife and children. This was a terrible threat, for he had been obliged to leave his family with only one or two soldiers to defend the house. Mrs. Cartwright knew what they had threatened; and on that dreadful night hearing, as she thought, steps approaching, she snatched up her two infant children, and put them in a basket up the great chimney, common in old-fashioned Yorkshire houses. One of the two children who had been thus stowed away, used to point out with pride, after she had grown up to woman's estate, the marks of musket-shot, and the traces of gunpowder on the walls of her father's mill. He was the first that had offered any resistance to the progress of the "Luddites," who had become by this time so numerous as almost to assume the character of an insurrectionary army. Mr. Cartwright's conduct was so much admired by the neighbouring mill-owners that they entered into a subscription for his benefit, which amounted in the end to 3,0001.

Not much more than a fortnight after this attack on Rawfolds, another manufacturer who employed the obnoxious machinery, was shot down in broad daylight, as he was passing over Crossland Moor, which was skirted by a small plantation in which the murderers lay hidden. The readers of "Shirley" will recognise these circumstances, which were related to Miss Brontë years after they occurred, but on the very spots where they took place, and by persons who remembered full well those terrible times of insecurity to life and property on the one hand, and of bitter starvation and blind ignorant despair on the other.

Mr. Brontë himself had been living amongst these very people in 1812, as he was then clergyman at Hartshead, not three miles from Rawfolds; and, as I have mentioned, it was in these perilous times that he began his custom of carrying a loaded pistol continually about with him. For not only his Tory

politics, but his love and regard for the authority of the law, made him despise the cowardice of the surrounding magistrates, who, in their dread of the Luddites, refused to interfere, so as to prevent the destruction of property. The clergy of the district were the bravest men by far. There was a Mr. Roberson, of Heald's Hall,[7] a friend of Mr. Brontë's, who has left a deep impression of himself on the public mind. He lived near Heckmondwike, a large, straggling, dirty village, not two miles from Roe Head. It was principally inhabited by blanket weavers, who worked in their own cottages; and Heald's Hall is the largest house in the village, of which Mr. Roberson was the vicar. At his own cost, he built a handsome church at Liversedge, on a hill opposite the one on which his house stood, which was the first attempt in the West Riding to meet the wants of the overgrown population, and made many personal sacrifices for his opinions, both religious and political, which were of the true old-fashioned Tory stamp. He hated everything which he fancied had a tendency towards anarchy. He was loyal in every fibre to Church and king; and would have proudly laid down his life, any day, for what he believed to be right and true. But he was a man of an imperial will, and by it he bore down opposition, till tradition represents him as having something grimly demoniac about him. He was intimate with Cartwright, and aware of the attack likely to be made on his mill; accordingly, it is said, he armed himself and his household, and was prepared to come to the rescue, in the event of a signal being given that aid was needed. Thus far is likely enough. Mr. Roberson had plenty of warlike spirit in him, man of peace though he was. But, in consequence of his having taken the unpopular side, exaggerations of his character linger as truth in the minds of the people; and a fabulous story is told of his forbidding any one to give water to the wounded Luddites, left in the mill-yard, when he rode in the next morning to congratulate his friend Cartwright on his successful defence. Moreover, this stern, fearless clergyman had the soldiers that were sent to defend the neighbourhood billeted at his house; and this deeply displeased the work-people, who were to be intimidated by the red-coats. Although not a magistrate, he spared no pains to track out the Luddites concerned in the assassination I have mentioned; and was so successful in his acute unflinching energy, that it was believed he had been supernaturally aided; and the country people,

stealing into the field surrounding Heald's Hall on dusky winter evenings, years after this time, declared that through the windows they saw Parson Roberson dancing, in a strange red light, with black demons all whirling and eddying round him. He kept a large boys' school; and made himself both respected and dreaded by his pupils. He added a grim kind of humour to his strength of will; and the former quality suggested to his fancy strange out-of-the-way kinds of punishment for any refractory pupils: for instance, he made them stand on one leg in a corner of the school-room, holding a heavy book in each hand; and once, when a boy had run away home, he followed him on horseback, reclaimed him from his parents, and, tying him by a rope to the stirrup of his saddle, made him run alongside of his horse for the many miles they had to traverse before reaching Heald's Hall. One other illustration of his character may be given. He discovered that his servant Betty had "a follower;" and, watching his time till Richard was found in the kitchen, he ordered him into the dining-room, where the pupils were all assembled. He then questioned Richard whether he had come after Betty; and on his confessing the truth, Mr. Roberson gave the word, "Off with him, lads, to the pump." The poor lover was dragged to the courtyard, and the pump set to play upon him; and, between every drenching, the question was put to him, "Will you promise not to come after Betty again?" For a long time Richard bravely refused to give in; when "Pump again, lads!" was the order. But, at last, the poor soaked "follower" was forced to yield, and renounce his Betty. The Yorkshire character of Mr. Roberson would be incomplete if I did not mention his fondness for horses. He lived to be a very old man, dying sometime nearer to 1840 than 1830; and even after he was eighty years of age, he took great delight in breaking refractory steeds; if necessary, he would sit motionless on their backs for half-an-hour or more, to bring them to. There is a story current that once, in a passion, he shot his wife's favourite horse, and buried it near a quarry, where the ground, some years after, miraculously opened and displayed the skeleton; but the real fact is, that it was an act of humanity to put a poor old horse out of misery; and that, to spare it pain, he shot it with his own hands, and buried it where the ground sinking afterwards by the working of a coal-pit, the bones came to light. The traditional colouring shows the animus with which his memory is regarded by one set of people. By another, the neighbouring clergy, who remember him riding, in his old age, down the

hill on which his house stood, upon his strong white horse—his bearing proud and dignified, his shovel hat bent over and shadowing his keen eagle eyes—going to his Sunday duty, like a faithful soldier that dies in harness—who can appreciate his loyalty to conscience, his sacrifices for duty, and his stand by his religion—his memory is venerated. In his extreme old age, a rubric-meeting was held, at which his clerical brethren gladly subscribed to present him with a testimonial of their deep respect and regard.

This is a specimen of the strong character not seldom manifested by the Yorkshire clergy of the Established Church. Mr. Roberson was a friend of Charlotte Brontë's father; lived within a couple of miles of Roe Head while she was at school there; and was deeply engaged in transactions, the memory of which was yet recent when she heard of them, and of the part which he had had in them. I may now say a little on the character of the Dissenting population immediately surrounding Roe Head; for the "Tory and clergyman's daughter," "taking interest in politics ever since she was five years old," and holding frequent discussions with such of the girls as were Dissenters and Radicals, was sure to have made herself as much acquainted as she could with the condition of those to whom she was opposed in opinion.

The bulk of the population were Dissenters, principally Independents. In the village of Heckmondwike, at one end of which Roe Head is situated, there were two large chapels, belonging to that denomination, and one to the Methodists, all of which were well filled two or three times on a Sunday, besides having various prayer-meetings, fully attended, on week-days. The inhabitants were a chapel-going people, very critical about the doctrine of their sermons, tyrannical to their ministers, and violent Radicals in politics. A friend, well acquainted with the place when Charlotte Brontë was at school, has described some events which occurred then among them:—

"A scene, which took place at the Lower Chapel at Heckmondwike, will give you some idea of the people at that time. When a newly-married couple made their appearance at chapel, it was the custom to sing the Wedding Anthem, just after the last prayer, and as the congregation was quitting the chapel. The band of singers who performed this ceremony expected to have money given them, and often passed the following night in

drinking; at least, so said the minister of the place; and he determined to put an end to this custom. In this he was supported by many members of the chapel and congregation; but so strong was the democratic element, that he met with the most violent opposition, and was often insulted when he went into the street. A bride was expected to make her first appearance, and the minister told the singers not to perform the anthem. On their declaring they would, he had the large pew which they usually occupied locked; they broke it open: from the pulpit he told the congregation that, instead of their singing a hymn, he would read a chapter. Hardly had he uttered the first word, before up rose the singers, headed by a tall, fierce-looking weaver, who gave out a hymn, and all sang it at the very top of their voices, aided by those of their friends who were in the chapel. Those who disapproved of the conduct of the singers, and sided with the minister, remained seated till the hymn was finished. Then he gave out the chapter again, read it, and preached. He was just about to conclude with prayer, when up started the singers and screamed forth another hymn. These disgraceful scenes were continued for many weeks, and so violent was the feeling, that the different parties could hardly keep from blows as they came through the chapel-yard. The minister, at last, left the place, and along with him went many of the most temperate and respectable part of the congregation, and the singers remained triumphant.

“I believe that there was such a violent contest respecting the choice of a pastor, about this time, in the upper chapel at Heckmondwike, that the Riot Act had to be read at a church-meeting.”

Certainly, the soi-disant Christians who forcibly ejected Mr. Redhead at Haworth, ten or twelve years before, held a very heathen brotherhood with the soi-disant Christians of Heckmondwike; though the one set might be called members of the Church of England, and the other Dissenters.

The letter from which I have taken the above extract relates throughout to the immediate neighbourhood of the place where Charlotte Brontë spent her school days, and describes things as they existed at that very time. The writer says,—“Having been accustomed to the respectful manners of the lower orders in the agricultural districts, I was, at first, much disgusted and somewhat alarmed at the great freedom displayed by the working classes of Heckmondwike and Gomersall to those in a station above them. The term

‘lass’ was as freely applied to any young lady, as the word ‘wench’ is in Lancashire. The extremely untidy appearance of the villages shocked me not a little, though I must do the housewives the justice to say that the cottages themselves were not dirty, and had an air of rough plenty about them (except when trade was bad), that I had not been accustomed to see in the farming districts. The heap of coals on one side of the house-door, and the brewing tubs on the other, and the frequent perfume of malt and hops as you walked along, proved that fire and “home-brewed” were to be found at almost every man’s hearth. Nor was hospitality, one of the main virtues of Yorkshire, wanting. Oat cake, cheese, and beer, were freely pressed upon the visitor.

“There used to be a yearly festival, half religious, half social, held at Heckmondwike, called ‘The Lecture.’ I fancy it had come down from the times of the Nonconformists. A sermon was preached by some stranger at the Lower Chapel, on a week day evening, and the next day two sermons in succession were delivered at the Upper Chapel. Of course, the service was a very long one, and as the time was June, and the weather often hot, it used to be regarded by myself and my companions as no pleasurable way of passing the morning. The rest of the day was spent in social enjoyment; great numbers of strangers flocked to the place; booths were erected for the sale of toys and gingerbread (a sort of ‘Holy Fair’); and the cottages having had a little extra paint and white-washing, assumed quite a holiday look.

“The village of Gomersall” (where Charlotte Brontë’s friend ‘Mary’ lived with her family), “which was a much prettier place than Heckmondwike, contained a strange-looking cottage, built of rough unhewn stones, many of them projecting considerably, with uncouth heads and grinning faces carved upon them; and upon a stone above the door was cut, in large letters, ‘SPITE HALL’ It was erected by a man in the village, opposite to the house of his enemy, who had just finished for himself a good house, commanding a beautiful view down the valley, which this hideous building quite shut out.”

Fearless—because this people were quite familiar to all of them—amidst such a population, lived and walked the gentle Miss Wooler’s eight or nine pupils. She herself was born and bred among this rough, strong, fierce set, and knew the depth of goodness and loyalty that lay beneath their wild

manners and insubordinate ways. And the girls talked of the little world around them, as if it were the only world that was; and had their opinions and their parties, and their fierce discussions like their elders—possibly, their betters. And among them, beloved and respected by all, laughed at occasionally by a few, but always to her face—lived, for two years, the plain, short-sighted, oddly-dressed, studious little girl they called Charlotte Brontë.

CHAPTER VII.

Miss Brontë left Roe Head in 1832, having won the affectionate regard both of her teacher and her school-fellows, and having formed there the two fast friendships which lasted her whole life long; the one with “Mary,” who has not kept her letters; the other with “E.” who has kindly entrusted me with as much of her correspondence as she has preserved. In looking over the earlier portion, I am struck afresh by the absence of hope, which formed such a strong characteristic in Charlotte. At an age when girls, in general, look forward to an eternal duration of such feelings as they or their friends entertain, and can therefore see no hindrance to the fulfilment of any engagements dependent on the future state of the affections, she is surprised that E. keeps her promise to write. In after-life, I was painfully impressed with the fact, that Miss Brontë never dared to allow herself to look forward with hope; that she had no confidence in the future; and I thought, when I heard of the sorrowful years she had passed through, that it had been this pressure of grief which had crushed all buoyancy of expectation out of her. But it appears from the letters, that it must have been, so to speak, constitutional; or, perhaps, the deep pang of losing her two elder sisters combined with a permanent state of bodily weakness in producing her hopelessness. If her trust in God had been less strong, she would have given way to unbounded anxiety, at many a period of her life. As it was, we shall see, she made a great and successful effort to leave “her times in His hands.”

After her return home, she employed herself in teaching her sisters, over whom she had had superior advantages. She writes thus, July 21st, 1832, of her course of life at the parsonage:—

“An account of one day is an account of all. In the morning, from nine o’clock till half-past twelve, I instruct my sisters, and draw; then we walk till dinner-time. After dinner I sew till tea-time, and after tea I either write, read, or do a little fancy work, or draw, as I please. Thus, in one delightful, though somewhat monotonous course, my life is passed. I have been only out twice to tea since I came home. We are expecting company this

afternoon, and on Tuesday next we shall have all the female teachers of the Sunday-school to tea."

It was about this time that Mr. Brontë provided his children with a teacher in drawing, who turned out to be a man of considerable talent, but very little principle. Although they never attained to anything like proficiency, they took great interest in acquiring this art; evidently, from an instinctive desire to express their powerful imaginations in visible forms. Charlotte told me, that, at this period of her life, drawing, and walking out with her sisters, formed the two great pleasures and relaxations of her day.

The three girls used to walk upwards towards the "purple-black" moors, the sweeping surface of which was broken by here and there a stone-quarry; and if they had strength and time to go far enough, they reached a waterfall, where the beck fell over some rocks into the "bottom." They seldom went downwards through the village. They were shy of meeting even familiar faces, and were scrupulous about entering the house of the very poorest uninvited. They were steady teachers at the Sunday-school, a habit which Charlotte kept up very faithfully, even after she was left alone; but they never faced their kind voluntarily, and always preferred the solitude and freedom of the moors.

In the September of this year, Charlotte went to pay her first visit to her friend E. It took her into the neighbourhood of Roe Head, and brought her into pleasant contact with many of her old schoolfellows. After this visit, she and her friend seem to have agreed to correspond in French, for the sake of improvement in the language. But this improvement could not be great, when it could only amount to a greater familiarity with dictionary words, and when there was no one to explain to them that a verbal translation of English idioms hardly constituted French composition; but the effort was laudable, and of itself shows how willing they both were to carry on the education which they had begun under Miss Wooler. I will give an extract which, whatever may be thought of the language, is graphic enough, and presents us with a happy little family picture; the eldest sister returning home to the two younger, after a fortnight's absence.

"J'arrivait à Haworth en parfaite sauveté sans le moindre accident ou malheur. Mes petites soeurs couraient hors de la maison pour me rencontrer

aussitôt que la voiture se fit voir, et elles m’embrassaient avec autant d’empressement, et de plaisir, comme si j’avais été absente pour plus d‘an. Mon Papa, ma Tante, et le monsieur dont mon frére avoit parlé, furent tous assembles dans le Salon, et en peu de temps je m’y rendis aussi. C‘est souvent l’ ordre du Ciel que quand on a perdu un plaisir il y en a un autre prêt à prendre sa place. Ainsi je venoit de partir de trés chérs amis, mais tout à l’heure je revins à des parens aussi chers et bons dans le moment. Même que vous me perdiez (ose-je croire que mon depart vous était un chagrin?) vous attendites l’ arrivée de votre frére, et de votre sœur. J‘ai donné a mes sœurs les pommes que vous leur envoyiez avec tant de bonté; elles disent qu’elles sont sur que Mademoiselle E. est trés aimable et bonne; l‘une et l’autre sont extremement impatientes de vous voir; j‘espére qu’en peu de mois elles auront ce plaisir.”[1]

But it was some time before the friends could meet, and meanwhile they agreed to correspond once a month. There were no events to chronicle in the Haworth letters. Quiet days, occupied in teaching, and feminine occupations in the house, did not present much to write about; and Charlotte was naturally driven to criticize books.

Of these there were many in different plights, and according to their plight, kept in different places. The well bound were ranged in the sanctuary of Mr. Brontë’s study; but the purchase of books was a necessary luxury to him, and as it was often a choice between binding an old one, or buying a new one, the familiar volume, which had been hungrily read by all the members of the family, was sometimes in such a condition that the bed-room shelf was considered its fitting place. Up and down the house, were to be found many standard works of a solid kind. Sir Walter Scott’s writings, Wordsworth’s and Southey’s poems[2] were among the lighter literature; while, as having a character of their own—earnest, wild, and occasionally fanatical—may be named some of the books which came from the Branwell side of the family—from the Cornish followers of the saintly John Wesley—and which are touched on in the account of the works to which Caroline Helstone had access in “Shirley”:—“Some venerable Lady’s Magazines, that had once performed a voyage with their owner, and undergone a storm”—(possibly part of the relics of Mrs. Brontë’s possessions, contained

in the ship wrecked on the coast of Cornwall)—"and whose pages were stained with salt water; some mad Methodist Magazines[3] full of miracles and apparitions, and preternatural warnings, ominous dreams, and frenzied fanaticism; and the equally mad Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe from the Dead to the Living."[f]

Mr. Brontë encouraged a taste for reading in his girls; and though Miss Branwell kept it in due bounds, by the variety of household occupations, in which she expected them not merely to take a part, but to become proficients, thereby occupying regularly a good portion of every day, they were allowed to get books from the circulating library at Keighley; and many a happy walk, up those long four miles must they have had burdened with some new book into which they peeped as they hurried home. Not that the books were what would generally be called new; in the beginning of 1833, the two friends seem almost simultaneously to have fallen upon "Kenilworth,"[g] and Charlotte writes as follows about it:—

"I am glad you like 'Kenilworth;' it is certainly more resembling a romance than a novel: in my opinion, one of the most interesting works that ever emanated from the great Sir Walter's pen. Varney is certainly the personification of consummate villany; and in the delineation of his dark and profoundly artful mind, Scott exhibits a wonderful knowledge of human nature, as well as surprising skill in embodying his perceptions, so as to enable others to become participators in that knowledge."

Commonplace as this extract may seem, it is note-worthy on two or three accounts: in the first place, instead of discussing the plot or story, she analyzes the character of Varney; and next, she, knowing nothing of the world, both from her youth and her isolated position, has yet been so accustomed to hear "human nature" distrusted, as to receive the notion of intense and artful villany without surprise.

What was formal and set in her way of writing to E. diminished as their personal acquaintance increased, and as each came to know the home of the other; so that small details concerning people and places had their interest and their significance. In the summer of 1833, she wrote to invite her friend to come and pay her a visit. "Aunt thought it would be better" (she says) "to

defer it until about the middle of summer, as the winter, and even the spring seasons, are remarkably cold and bleak among our mountains."

The first impression made on the visitor by the sisters of her school-friend was, that Emily was a tall, long-armed girl, more fully grown than her elder sister; extremely reserved in manner. I distinguish reserve from shyness, because I imagine shyness would please, if it knew how; whereas, reserve is indifferent whether it pleases or not. Anne, like her eldest sister, was shy; Emily was reserved.

Branwell was rather a handsome boy, with "tawny" hair, to use Miss Brontë's phrase for a more obnoxious colour. All were very clever, original, and utterly different to any people or family E. had ever seen before. But, on the whole, it was a happy visit to all parties. Charlotte says, in writing to E., just after her return home—"Were I to tell you of the impression you have made on every one here, you would accuse me of flattery. Papa and aunt are continually adducing you as an example for me to shape my actions and behaviour by. Emily and Anne say 'they never saw any one they liked so well as you.' And Tabby, whom you have absolutely fascinated, talks a great deal more nonsense about your ladyship than I care to repeat. It is now so dark that, notwithstanding the singular property of seeing in the night-time, which the young ladies at Roe Head used to attribute to me, I can scribble no longer."

To a visitor at the parsonage, it was a great thing to have Tabby's good word. She had a Yorkshire keenness of perception into character, and it was not everybody she liked.

Haworth is built with an utter disregard of all sanitary conditions: the great old churchyard lies above all the houses, and it is terrible to think how the very water-springs of the pumps below must be poisoned. But this winter of 1833-4 was particularly wet and rainy, and there were an unusual number of deaths in the village. A dreary season it was to the family in the parsonage: their usual walks obstructed by the spongy state of the moors—the passing and funeral bells so frequently tolling, and filling the heavy air with their mournful sound—and, when they were still, the "chip, chip" of the mason, as he cut the grave-stones in a shed close by. In many, living, as it were, in a churchyard—for the parsonage is surrounded by it on three

sides—and with all the sights and sounds connected with the last offices to the dead things of every-day occurrence, the very familiarity would have bred indifference. But it was otherwise with Charlotte Brontë. One of her friends says:—“I have seen her turn pale and feel faint when, in Hartshead church, some one accidentally remarked that we were walking over graves.”

About the beginning of 1834, E. went to London for the first time. The idea of her friend’s visit seems to have stirred Charlotte strangely. She appears to have formed her notions of its probable consequences from some of the papers in the “British Essayists,” “The Rambler,” “The Mirror,” or “The Lounger,”[4] which may have been among the English classics on the parsonage book-shelves; for she evidently imagines that an entire change of character for the worse is the usual effect of a visit to “the great metropolis,” and is delighted to find that E. is E. still. And, as her faith in her friend’s stability is restored, her own imagination is deeply moved by the ideas of what great wonders are to be seen in that vast and famous city.

“*Haworth, February* 20th, 1834.

“Your letter gave me real and heartfelt pleasure, mingled with no small share of astonishment. Mary had previously informed me of your departure for London, and I had not ventured to calculate on any communication from you while surrounded by the splendours and novelties of that great city, which has been called the mercantile metropolis of Europe. Judging from human nature, I thought that a little country girl, for the first time in a situation so well calculated to excite curiosity, and to distract attention, would lose all remembrance, for a time at least, of distant and familiar objects, and give herself up entirely to the fascination of those scenes which were then presented to her view. Your kind, interesting, and most welcome epistle showed me, however, that I had been both mistaken and uncharitable in these suppositions. I was greatly amused at the tone of nonchalance which you assumed, while treating of London and its wonders. Did you not feel awed while gazing at St. Paul’s and Westminster Abbey? Had you no feeling of intense and ardent interest, when in St. James’s you saw the palace where so many of England’s kings have held their courts, and beheld

the representations of their persons on the walls? You should not be too much afraid of appearing country-bred; the magnificence of London has drawn exclamations of astonishment from travelled men, experienced in the world, its wonders and beauties. Have you yet seen anything of the great personages whom the sitting of Parliament now detains in London—the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, Earl Grey, Mr. Stanley, Mr. O'Connell? If I were you, I would not be too anxious to spend my time in reading whilst in town. Make use of your own eyes for the purposes of observation now, and, for a time at least, lay aside the spectacles with which authors would furnish us."

In a postscript she adds:—

"Will you be kind enough to inform me of the number of performers in the King's military band?"

And in something of the same strain she writes on:—

"*June* 19*th*.

"My own DEAR E.,

"I may rightfully and truly call you so now. You have returned or are returning from London—from the great city which is to me as apocryphal as Babylon, or Nineveh, or ancient Rome. You are withdrawing from the world (as it is called), and bringing with you—if your letters enable me to form a correct judgment—a heart as unsophisticated, as natural, as true, as that you carried there. I am slow, very slow, to believe the protestations of another; I know my own sentiments, I can read my own mind, but the minds of the rest of man and woman kind are to me sealed volumes, hieroglyphical scrolls, which I cannot easily either unseal or decipher. Yet time, careful study, long acquaintance, overcome most difficulties; and, in your case, I think they have succeeded well in bringing to light and construing that hidden language, whose turnings, windings, inconsistencies,

and obscurities, so frequently baffle the researches of the honest observer of human nature.... I am truly grateful for your mindfulness of so obscure a person as myself, and I hope the pleasure is not altogether selfish; I trust it is partly derived from the consciousness that my friend's character is of a higher, a more steadfast order than I was once perfectly aware of Few girls would have done as you have done—would have beheld the glare, and glitter, and dazzling display of London with dispositions so unchanged, heart so uncontaminated.

I see no affectation in your letters, no trifling, no frivolous contempt of plain, and weak admiration of showy persons and things."

In these days of cheap railway trips, we may smile at the idea of a short visit to London having any great effect upon the character, whatever it may have upon the intellect. But her London—her great apocryphal city—was the "town" of a century before, to which giddy daughters dragged unwilling willing papas, or went with injudicious friends, to the detriment of all their better qualities, and sometimes to the ruin of their fortunes; it was the Vanity Fair of the "Pilgrim's Progress" to her.

But see the just and admirable sense with which she can treat a subject of which she is able to overlook all the bearings.

"Haworth, July 4*th*, 1834.

"In your last, you requested me to tell you of your faults. Now, really, how can you be so foolish! I won't tell you of your faults, because I don't know them. What a creature would that be, who, after receiving an affectionate and kind letter from a beloved friend, should sit down and write a catalogue of defects by way of answer! Imagine me doing so, and then consider what epithets you would bestow on me. Conceited, dogmatical, hypocritical, little humbug, I should think, would be the mildest. Why, child! I've neither time nor inclination to reflect on your faults when you are so far from me, and when, besides, kind letters and presents, and so forth, are continually bringing forth your goodness in the most prominent light. Then, too, there are judicious relations always round you, who can

much better discharge that unpleasant office. I have no doubt their advice is completely at your service; why then should I intrude mine? If you will not hear them, it will be vain though one should rise from the dead to instruct you. Let us have no more nonsense, if you love me. Mr.——is going to be married, is he? Well, his wife elect appeared to me to be a clever and amiable lady, as far as I could judge from the little I saw of her, and from your account. Now to that flattering sentence must I tack on a list of her faults? You say it is in contemplation for you to leave—I am sorry for it.—is a pleasant spot, one of the old family halls of England, surrounded by lawn and woodland, speaking of past times, and suggesting (to me at least) happy feelings.

M. thought you grown less, did she? I am not grown a bit, but as short and dumpy as ever. You ask me to recommend you some books for your perusal. I will do so in as few words as I can. If you like poetry, let it be first-rate; Milton, Shakspeare, Thomson, Goldsmith, Pope (if you will, though I don't admire him), Scott, Byron, Camp-bell, Wordsworth, and Southey. Now don't be startled at the names of Shakspeare and Byron. Both these were great men, and their works are like themselves. You will know how to choose the good, and to avoid the evil; the finest passages are always the purest, the bad are invariably revolting; you will never wish to read them over twice. Omit the comedies of Shakspeare and the Don Juan, perhaps the Cain, of Byron, though the latter is a magnificent poem, and read the rest fearlessly; [5] that must indeed be a depraved mind which can gather evil from Henry VIII., from Richard III., from Macbeth, and Hamlet, and Julius Caesar. Scott's sweet, wild, romantic poetry can do you no harm. Nor can Wordsworth's, nor Campbell's, nor Southey s—the greatest part at least of his; some is certainly objectionable. For history, read Hume, Rollin, and the Universal History, if you can; I never did. For fiction, read Scott alone; all novels after his are worthless. For biography, read Johnson's Lives of the Poets, Boswell's Life of Johnson, Southey's Life of Nelson, Lockhart's Life of Burns, Moore's Life of Sheridan, Moore's Life of Byron, Wolf 's Remains. For natural history, read Bewick and Audubon, and Goldsmith, and White's History of Selborne. For divinity, your brother will advise you there. I can only say, adhere to standard authors, and avoid novelty."

From this list, we see that she must have had a good range of books from which to choose her own reading. It is evident, that the womanly consciences of these two correspondents were anxiously alive to many questions discussed among the stricter religionists. The morality of Shakspeare needed the confirmation of Charlotte's opinion to the sensitive E.; and a little later, she inquired whether dancing was objectionable, when indulged in for an hour or two in parties of boys and girls. Charlotte replies, "I should hesitate to express a difference of opinion from Mr.—, or from your excellent sister, but really the matter seems to me to stand thus. It is allowed on all hands, that the sin of dancing consists not in the mere action of "shaking the shanks" (as the Scotch say), but in the consequences that usually attend it; namely, frivolity and waste of time; when it is used only, as in the case you state, for the exercise and amusement of an hour among young people (who surely may without any breach of God's commandments be allowed a little light-heartedness), these consequences cannot follow. Ergo (according to my manner of arguing), the amusement is at such times perfectly innocent."

Although the distance between Haworth and B—was but seventeen miles, it was difficult to go straight from the one to the other without hiring a gig or vehicle of some kind for the journey. Hence a visit from Charlotte required a good deal of pre-arrangement. The Haworth gig was not always to be had; and Mr. Brontë was often unwilling to fall into any arrangement for meeting at Bradford or other places, which would occasion trouble to others. They had all an ample share of that sensitive pride which led them to dread incurring obligations, and to fear "outstaying their welcome" when on any visit. I am not sure whether Mr. Brontë did not consider distrust of others as a part of that knowledge of human nature on which he piqued himself. His precepts to this effect, combined with Charlotte's lack of hope, made her always fearful of loving too much; of wearying the objects of her affection; and thus she was often trying to restrain her warm feelings, and was ever chary of that presence so invariably welcome to her true friends. According to this mode of acting, when she was invited for a month, she stayed but a fortnight amidst E.'s family, to whom every visit only endeared her the more, and by whom she was received with that kind of quiet gladness with which they would have greeted a sister.

She still kept up her childish interest in politics. In March, 1835, she writes: “What do you think of the course politics are taking? I make this inquiry, because I now think you take a wholesome interest in the matter; formerly you did not care greatly about it. B., you see, is triumphant. Wretch! I am a hearty hater, and if there is any one I thoroughly abhor, it is that man. But the Opposition is divided, Redhots, and Luke-warms; and the Duke (par-excellence the Duke,) and Sir Robert Peel show no signs of insecurity, though they have been twice beat; so ‘Courage, mon amie,’ as the old chevaliers used to say, before they joined battle.”

In the middle of the summer of 1835. a great family plan was mooted at the parsonage. The question was, to what trade or profession should Branwell be brought up? He was now nearly eighteen; it was time to decide. He was very clever, no doubt; perhaps, to begin with, the greatest genius in this rare family. The sisters hardly recognised their own, or each other’s powers, but they knew his. The father, ignorant of many failings in moral conduct, did proud homage to the great gifts of his son; for Branwell’s talents were readily and willingly brought out for the entertainment of others. Popular admiration was sweet to him. And this led to his presence being sought at “arvills” and all the great village gatherings, for the Yorkshire men have a keen relish for intellect; and it likewise procured him the undesirable distinction of having his company recommended by the landlord of the Black Bull to any chance traveller who might happen to feel solitary or dull over his liquor. “Do you want some one to help you with your bottle, sir? If you do, I’ll send up for Patrick” (so the villagers called him till the day of his death). And while the messenger went, the landlord entertained his guests with accounts of the wonderful talents of the boy, whose precocious cleverness, and great conversational powers, were the pride of the village. The attacks of ill health to which Mr. Brontë had been subject of late years, rendered it not only necessary that he should take his dinner alone (for the sake of avoiding temptations to unwholesome diet), but made it also desirable that he should pass the time directly succeeding his meals in perfect quiet. And this necessity, combined with due attention to his parochial duties, made him partially ignorant how his son employed himself out of lesson-time. His own youth had been spent among people of the same conventional rank as those into whose

companionship Branwell was now thrown; but he had had a strong will, and an earnest and persevering ambition, and a resoluteness of purpose which his weaker son wanted.

It is singular how strong a yearning the whole family had towards the art of drawing. Mr. Brontë had been very solicitous to get them good instruction; the girls themselves loved every thing connected with it—all descriptions or engravings of great pictures; and, in default of good ones, they would take and analyse any print or drawing which came in their way, and find out how much thought had gone to its composition, what ideas it was intended to suggest, and what it did suggest. In the same spirit, they laboured to design imaginations of their own; they lacked the power of execution, not of conception. At one time, Charlotte had the notion of making her living as an artist, and wearied her eyes in drawing with pre-Raphaelite minuteness, but not with pre-Raphaelite accuracy, for she drew from fancy rather than from nature.

But they all thought there could be no doubt about Branwell's talent for drawing. I have seen an oil painting of his, done I know not when, but probably about this time. It was a group of his sisters, life size, three-quarters' length; not much better than sign-painting, as to manipulation; but the likenesses were, I should think, admirable. I could only judge of the fidelity with which the other two were depicted, from the striking resemblance which Charlotte, upholding the great frame of canvas, and consequently standing right behind it, bore to her own representation, though it must have been ten years and more since the portraits were taken. The picture was divided, almost in the middle, by a great pillar. On the side of the column which was lighted by the sun, stood Charlotte, in the womanly dress of that day of jigot sleeves and large collars. On the deeply shadowed side, was Emily, with Anne's gentle face resting on her shoulder. Emily's countenance struck me as full of power; Charlotte's of solicitude; Anne's of tenderness. The two younger seemed hardly to have attained their full growth, though Emily was taller than Charlotte; they had cropped hair, and a more girlish dress. I remember looking on those two sad, earnest, shadowed faces, and wondering whether I could trace the mysterious expression which is said to foretell an early death. I had some fond superstitious hope that the column divided their fates from hers, who stood

apart in the canvas, as in life she survived. I liked to see that the bright side of the pillar was towards her—that the light in the picture fell on her: I might more truly have sought in her presentment—nay, in her living face—for the sign of death in her prime. They were good likenesses, however badly executed. From thence I should guess his family augured truly that, if Branwell had but the opportunity, and, alas! had but the moral qualities, he might turn out a great painter.

The best way of preparing him to become so appeared to be to send him as a pupil to the Royal Academy. I dare say, he longed and yearned to follow this path, principally because it would lead him to that mysterious London—that Babylon the great—which seems to have filled the imaginations and haunted the minds of all the younger members of this recluse family. To Branwell it was more than a vivid imagination, it was an impressed reality. By dint of studying maps, he was as well acquainted with it, even down to its by-ways, as if he had lived there. Poor misguided fellow! this craving to see and know London, and that stronger craving after fame, were never to be satisfied. He was to die at the end of a short and blighted life. But in this year of 1835, all his home kindred were thinking how they could best forward his views, and how help him up to the pinnacle where he desired to be. What their plans were, let Charlotte explain. These are not the first sisters who have laid their lives as a sacrifice before their brother's idolized wish. Would to God they might be the last who met with such a miserable return!

"Haworth, July 6th, 1835.

"I had hoped to have had the extreme pleasure of seeing you at Haworth this summer, but human affairs are mutable, and human resolutions must bend to the course of events. We are all about to divide, break up, separate. Emily is going to school, Branwell is going to London, and I am going to be a governess. This last determination I formed myself, knowing that I should have to take the step sometime, 'and better sune as syne,' to use the Scotch proverb; and knowing well that papa would have enough to do with his limited income, should Branwell be placed at the Royal Academy, and Emily at Roe Head. Where am I going to reside? you will ask. Within four

miles of you, at a place neither of us are unacquainted with, being no other than the identical Roe Head mentioned above. Yes! I am going to teach in the very school where I was myself taught. Miss Wooler made me the offer, and I preferred it to one or two proposals of private governess-ship, which I had before received. I am sad—very sad—at the thoughts of leaving home; but duty—necessity—these are stern mistresses, who will not be disobeyed. Did I not once say you ought to be thankful for your independence? I felt what I said at the time, and I repeat it now with double earnestness; if anything would cheer me, it is the idea of being so near you. Surely, you and Polly will come and see me; it would be wrong in me to doubt it; you were never unkind yet. Emily and I leave home on the 27th of this month; the idea of being together consoles us both somewhat, and, truth, since I must enter a situation, ‘My lines have fallen in pleasant places.’ I both love and respect Miss Wooler.”

CHAPTER VIII.

On the 29th of July, 1835, Charlotte, now little more than nineteen years old, went as teacher to Miss Wooler's. Emily accompanied her, as a pupil; but she became literally ill from home-sickness, and could not settle to anything, and after passing only three months at Roe Head, returned to the parsonage and the beloved moors.

Miss Brontë gives the following reasons as those which prevented Emily's remaining at school, and caused the substitution of her younger sister in her place at Miss Wooler's:—[1]

"My sister Emily loved the moors. Flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the blackest of the heath for her;—out of a sullen hollow in a livid hill-side, her mind could make an Eden. She found in the bleak solitude many and dear delights; and not the least and best-loved was—liberty. Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils; without it she perished. The change from her own home to a school, and from her own very noiseless, very secluded, but unrestricted and unartificial mode of life, to one of disciplined routine (though under the kindest auspices), was what she failed in enduring. Her nature proved here too strong for her fortitude. Every morning, when she woke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Nobody knew what ailed her but me. I knew only too well. In this struggle her health was quickly broken: her white face, attenuated form, and failing strength, threatened rapid decline. I felt in my heart she would die, if she did not go home, and with this conviction obtained her recall. She had only been three months at school; and it was some years before the experiment of sending her from home was again ventured on."

This physical suffering on Emily's part when absent from Haworth, after recurring several times under similar circumstances, became at length so much an acknowledged fact, that whichever was obliged to leave home, the sisters decided that Emily must remain there, where alone she could enjoy anything like good health. She left it twice again in her life; once going as teacher to a school in Halifax for six months, and afterwards accompanying

Charlotte to Brussels for ten. When at home, she took the principal part of the cooking upon herself, and did all the household ironing; and after Tabby grew old and infirm, it was Emily who made all the bread for the family; and any one passing by the kitchen-door, might have seen her studying German out of an open book, propped up before her, as she kneaded the dough; but no study, however interesting, interfered with the goodness of the bread, which was always light and excellent. Books were, indeed, a very common sight in that kitchen; the girls were taught by their father theoretically, and by their aunt practically, that to take an active part in all household work was, in their position, woman's simple duty; but, in their careful employment of time, they found many an odd five minutes for reading while watching the cakes, and managed the union of two kinds of employment better than King Alfred.

Charlotte's life at Miss Wooler's was a very happy one, until her health failed. She sincerely loved and respected the former schoolmistress, to whom she was now become both companion and friend. The girls were hardly strangers to her, some of them being younger sisters of those who had been her own playmates. Though the duties of the day might be tedious and monotonous,[2] there were always two or three happy hours to look forward to in the evening, when she and Miss Wooler sat together—sometimes late into the night—and had quiet pleasant conversations, or pauses of silence as agreeable, because each felt that as soon as a thought or remark occurred which they wished to express, there was an intelligent companion ready to sympathise, and yet they were not compelled to "make talk."

It was about this time that an event happened in the neighbourhood of Leeds, which excited a good deal of interest.[3] A young lady, who held the situation of governess in a very respectable family, had been wooed and married by a gentleman, holding some subordinate position in the commercial firm to which the young lady's employer belonged. A year after her marriage, during which time she had given birth to a child, it was discovered that he whom she called husband had another wife. Report now says, that this first wife was deranged, and that he had made this an excuse to himself for his subsequent marriage. But, at any rate, the condition of the

wife who was no wife—of the innocent mother of the illegitimate child—excited the deepest commiseration; and the case was spoken of far and wide, and at Roe Head among other places.

Miss Wooler was always anxious to afford Miss Brontë every opportunity of recreation in her power; but the difficulty often was to persuade her to avail herself of the invitations which came, urging her to spend Saturday and Sunday with E. and Mary, in their respective homes, that lay within the distance of a walk. But Miss Brontë was too apt to consider, that allowing herself a holiday was a dereliction of duty, and to refuse herself the necessary change from something of an over-ascetic spirit, betokening a loss of healthy balance in either body or mind. Indeed, it is clear that such was the case, from an extract referring to this time, taken out of the letter I have before referred to, from "Mary."

"Three years after"—(the period when they were at school together)—"I heard that she had gone as teacher to Miss Wooler's. I went to see her, and asked how she could give so much for so little money, when she could live without it. She owned that, after clothing herself and Anne, there was nothing left, though she had hoped to be able to save something. She confessed it was not brilliant, but what could she do? I had nothing to answer. She seemed to have no interest or pleasure beyond the feeling of duty, and, when she could get, used to sit alone, and 'make out.' She told me afterwards, that one evening she had sat in the dressing-room until it was quite dark, and then observing it all at once, had taken sudden fright." No doubt she remembered this well when she described a similar terror getting hold upon Jane Eyre. She says in the story, "I sat looking at the white bed and overshadowed walls—occasionally turning a fascinated eye towards the gleaming mirror—I began to recall what I had heard of dead men troubled in their graves..... I endeavored to be firm; shaking my hair from my eyes, I lifted my head and tried to look boldly through the dark room; at this moment, a ray from the moon penetrated some aperture in the blind. No! moonlight was still, and this stirred ..... prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears which I deemed the rustling of wings; something seemed near me."[h]

“From that time,” Mary adds, “her imaginations became gloomy or frightful; she could not help it, nor help thinking. She could not forget the gloom, could not sleep at night, nor attend in the day”

Of course the state of health thus described came on gradually, and is not to be taken as a picture of her condition in 1836. Yet even then there is a despondency in some of her expressions, that too sadly reminds one of some of Cowper’s letters. And it is remarkable how deeply his poems impressed her. His words, his verses, came more frequently to her memory, I imagine, than those of any other poet.[4]

“*May 10th*, 1836.

“I was struck with the note you sent me with the umbrella; it showed a degree of interest in my concerns which I have no right to expect from any earthly creature. I won’t play the hypocrite; I won’t answer your kind, gentle, friendly questions in the way you wish me to. Don’t deceive yourself by imagining I have a bit of real goodness about me. My darling, if I were like you, I should have my face Zion-ward, though prejudice and error might occasionally fling a mist over the glorious vision before me—but I am not like you. If you knew my thoughts, the dreams that absorb me, and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up, and makes me feel society, as it is, wretchedly insipid, you would pity and I dare say despise me. But I know the treasures of the Bible; I love and adore them. I can see the Well of Life in all its clearness and brightness; but when I stoop down to drink of the pure waters they fly from my lips as if I were Tantalus.[5]

“You are far too kind and frequent in your invitations. You puzzle me. I hardly know how to refuse, and it is still more embarrassing to accept. At any rate, I cannot come this week, for we are in the very thickest melée of the Repetitions. I was hearing the terrible fifth section when your note arrived. But Miss Wooler says I must go to Mary next Friday, as she promised for me on Whit-Sunday; and on Sunday morning I will join you at church, if it be convenient, and stay till Monday. There’s a free and easy proposal! Miss Wooler has driven me to it. She says her character is implicated.”

Good, kind Miss Wooler! however monotonous and trying were the duties Charlotte had to perform under her roof, there was always a genial and thoughtful friend watching over her, and urging her to partake of any little piece of innocent recreation that might come in her way. And in those Midsummer holidays of 1836, her friend E. came to stay with her at Haworth, so there was one happy time secured.

Here follows a series of letters, not dated, but belonging to the latter portion of this year; and again we think of the gentle and melancholy Cowper.

"MY dear dear E.,

I am at this moment trembling all over with excitement, after reading your note; it is what I never received before—it is the unrestrained pouring out of a warm, gentle, generous heart..... I thank you with energy for this kindness. I will no longer shrink from answering your questions. I do wish to be better than I am. I pray fervently sometimes to be made so. I have stings of conscience, visitings of remorse, glimpses of holy, of inexpressible things, which formerly I used to be a stranger to; it may all die away, and I may be in utter midnight, but I implore a merciful Redeemer, that, if this be the dawn of the gospel, it may still brighten to perfect day. Do not mistake me —do not think I am good; I only wish to be so. I only hate my former flippancy and forwardness. Oh! I am no better than ever I was. I am in that state of horrid, gloomy uncertainty that, at this moment, I would submit to be old, grey-haired, to have passed all my youthful days of enjoyment, and to be settling on the verge of the grave, if I could only thereby ensure the prospect of reconciliation to God, and redemption through his Son's merits. I never was exactly careless of these matters, but I have always taken a clouded and repulsive view of them; and now, if possible, the clouds are gathering darker, and a more oppressive despondency weighs on my spirits. You have cheered me, my darling; for one moment, for an atom of time, I thought I might call you my own sister in the spirit; but the excitement is past, and I am now as wretched and hopeless as ever. This very night I will pray as you wish me. May the Almighty hear me compassionately! and I humbly hope he will, for you will strengthen my polluted petitions with

your own pure requests. All is bustle and confusion round me, the ladies pressing with their sums and their lessons..... If you love me, do, do, do come on Friday: I shall watch and wait for you, and if you disappoint me I shall weep. I wish you could know the thrill of delight which I experienced, when, as I stood at the dining-room window, I saw—, as he whirled past, toss your little packet over the wall."

Huddersfield market-day was still the great period for events at Roe Head. Then girls, running round the corner of the house and peeping between tree-stems, and up a shadowy lane, could catch a glimpse of a father or brother driving to market in his gig; might, perhaps, exchange a wave of the hand; or see, as Charlotte Brontë did from the window forbidden to pupils, a white packet tossed over the wall, by some swift strong motion of an arm, the rest of the traveller's body unseen.

"Weary with a day's hard work..... I am sitting down to write a few lines to my dear E. Excuse me if I say nothing but nonsense, for my mind is exhausted and dispirited. It is a stormy evening, and the wind is uttering a continual moaning sound, that makes me feel very melancholy. At such times—in such moods as these—it is my nature to seek repose in some calm tranquil idea, and I have now summoned up your image to give me rest. There you sit, upright and still, in your black dress, and white scarf, and pale marble-like face—just like reality. I wish you would speak to me. If we should be separated—if it should be our lot to live at a great distance, and never to see each other again—in old age, how I should conjure up the memory of my youthful days, and what a melancholy pleasure I should feel in dwelling on the recollection of my early friend!.... I have some qualities that make me very miserable, some feelings that you can have no participation in—that few, very few, people in the world can at all understand. I don't pride myself on these peculiarities. I strive to conceal and suppress them as much as I can; but they burst out sometimes, and then those who see the explosion despise me, and I hate myself for days afterwards.... I have just received your epistle and what accompanied it. I can't tell what should induce you and your sisters to waste your kindness on such a one as me. I'm obliged to them, and I hope you'll tell them so. I'm obliged to you also, more for your note than for your present. The first gave me pleasure, the last something like pain."

The nervous disturbance, which is stated to have troubled her while she was at Miss Wooler's, seems to have begun to distress her about this time; at least, she herself speaks of her irritable condition, which was certainly only a temporary ailment.

"You have been very kind to me of late, and have spared me all those little sallies of ridicule, which, owing to my miserable and wretched touchiness of character, used formerly to make me wince, as if I had been touched with a hot iron; things that nobody else cares for, enter into my mind and rankle there like venom. I know these feelings are absurd, and therefore I try to hide them, but they only sting the deeper for concealment."

Compare this state of mind with the gentle resignation with which she submitted to be put aside as useless, or told of her ugliness by her schoolfellows, only three years before.

"My life since I saw you has passed as monotonously and unbroken as ever; nothing but teach, teach, teach, from morning till night. The greatest variety I ever have is afforded by a letter from you, or by meeting with a pleasant new book. The 'Life of Oberlin,' and 'Legh Richmond's Domestic Portraiture,' are the last of this description. The latter work strongly attracted and strangely fascinated my attention. Beg, borrow, or steal it without delay; and read the 'Memoir of Wilberforce,' —that short record of a brief uneventful life; I shall never forget it; it is beautiful, not on account of the language in which it is written, not on account of the incidents which it details, but because of the simple narrative it gives of a young talented, sincere Christian."

About this time Miss Wooler removed her school from the fine, open, breezy situation of Roe Head, to Dewsbury Moor, only two or three miles distant. Her new residence was a much lower site, and the air much less pure and exhilarating to one bred at the wild hill-village of Haworth. Charlotte felt the change extremely, and regretted it not merely on her own account, but for the sake of her sister Anne. Moreover, Emily had gone as teacher to a school at Halifax, where there were nearly forty pupils.

"I have had one letter from her since her departure," writes Charlotte, on October 2nd, 1836: "It gives an appalling account of her duties; hard labour

from six in the morning to eleven at night, with only one half-hour of exercise between. This is slavery. I fear she can never stand it."

When the sisters met at home in the Christmas holidays, they talked over their lives, and the prospect which they afforded of occupation and remuneration. They felt that it was a duty to relieve their father of the burden of their support, if not entirely, or that of all three, at least that of one or two; and, naturally, the lot devolved upon the elder ones to find some remunerative occupation. They knew that they were never likely to inherit much money. Mr. Brontë had but a small stipend, and was both charitable and liberal. Their aunt had an annuity of 501., but it reverted to others at her death, and her nieces had no right, and were the last persons in the world, to reckon upon her savings. What could they do? Charlotte and Emily were trying teaching, and as it seemed without much success. The former, it is true, had the happiness of having a friend for her employer, and being surrounded by those who knew her and loved her; but her salary was too small for her to save out of it; and her education did not entitle her to a larger. The sedentary and monotonous nature of her life, too, was preying upon her health and spirits, although, with necessity "as her mistress," she might hardly like to acknowledge this even to herself. But Emily—that free, wild untameable spirit, never happy nor well but on the sweeping moors that gathered round her home—that hater of strangers, doomed to live amongst them, and not merely to live but to slave in their service—what Charlotte could have borne patiently for herself, she could not bear for her sister. And yet what to do? She had once hoped that she herself might become an artist, and so earn her livelihood; but her eyes had failed her in the minute and useless labour which she had imposed upon herself with a view to this end.

It was the household custom among these girls to sew till nine o'clock at night. At that hour, Miss Branwell generally went to bed, and her nieces' duties for the day were accounted done. They put away their work, and began to pace the room backwards and forwards, up and down,—as often with the candles extinguished, for economy's sake, as not,—their figures glancing into the fire-light, and out into the shadow, perpetually. At this time, they talked over past cares, and troubles; they planned for the future, and consulted each other as to their plans. In after years, this was the time

for discussing together the plots of their novels. And again still later this was the time for the last surviving sister to walk alone, from old accustomed habit, round and round the desolate room, thinking sadly upon the “days that were no more.” But this Christmas of 1836 was not without its hopes and daring aspirations. They had tried their hands at story-writing, in their miniature magazine, long ago; they all of them “made out” perpetually. They had likewise attempted to write poetry; and had a modest confidence that they had achieved a tolerable success. But they knew that they might deceive themselves, and that sisters’ judgments of each other’s productions were likely to be too partial to be depended upon. So Charlotte as the eldest resolved to write to Southey. I believe (from an expression in a letter to be noticed hereafter), that she also consulted Coleridge;[6] but I have not met with any part of that correspondence.

On December 29th, her letter to Southey was despatched; and from an excitement not unnatural in a girl who has worked herself up to the pitch of writing to a Poet Laureate and asking his opinion of her poems, she used some high-flown expressions, which, probably, gave him the idea that she was a romantic young lady, unacquainted with the realities of life.

This most likely was the first of those adventurous letters that passed through the little post-office of Haworth. Morning after morning of the holidays slipped away, and there was no answer; the sisters had to leave home, and Emily to return to her distasteful duties, without knowing even whether Charlotte’s letter had ever reached its destination.

Not dispirited, however, by the delay, Branwell determined to try a similar venture, and addressed the following remarkable letter to Wordsworth. It was given by the poet to Mr. Quillinan[7] in 1850, after the name of Brontë had become known and famous. I have no means of ascertaining what answer was returned by Mr. Wordsworth; but that he considered the letter remarkable may, I think, be inferred both from its preservation, and its recurrence to his memory when the real name of Currer Bell was made known to the public.

Haworth, near Bradford,

Yorkshire, January 19 , 1837.

“SIR,—I most earnestly entreat you to read and pass your judgment upon what I have sent you, because from the day of my birth to this the nineteenth year of my life, I have lived among secluded hills, where I could neither know what I was, or what I could do. I read for the same reason that I ate or drank; because it was a real craving of nature. I wrote on the same principle as I spoke—out of the impulse and feelings of the mind; nor could I help it, for what came, came out, and there was the end of it. For as to self-conceit, that could not receive food from flattery, since to this hour, not half a dozen people in the world know that I have ever penned a line.

“But a change has taken place now, sir: and I am arrived at an age wherein I must do something for myself: the powers I possess must be exercised to a definite end, and as I don’t know them myself I must ask of others what they are worth. Yet there is not one here to tell me; and still, if they are worthless, time will henceforth be too precious to be wasted on them.

“Do pardon me, sir, that I have ventured to come before one whose works I have most loved in our literature, and who most has been with me a divinity of the mind,—laying before him one of my writings, and asking of him a judgment of its contents. I must come before some one from whose sentence there is no appeal; and such a one is he who has developed the theory of poetry as well as its practice, and both in such a way as to claim a place in the memory of a thousand years to come.

“My aim, sir, is to push out into the open world, and for this I trust not poetry alone—that might launch the vessel, but could not bear her on; sensible and scientific prose, bold and vigorous efforts in my walk in life, would give a farther title to the notice of the world; and then again poetry ought to brighten and crown that name with glory; but nothing of all this can be ever begun without means, and as I don’t possess these, I must in every shape strive to gain them. Surely, in this day when there is not a writing poet worth a sixpence, the field must be open, if a better man can step forward.

“What I send you is the Prefatory Scene of a much longer subject, in which I have striven to develop strong passions and weak principles struggling with a high imagination and acute feelings, till as youth hardens

towards age, evil deeds and short enjoyments end in mental misery and bodily ruin. Now, to send you the whole of this would be a mock upon your patience; what you see, does not even pretend to be more than the description of an imaginative child. But read it, sir; and as you would hold a light to one in utter darkness—as you value your own kind-heartedness—return me an answer, if but one word, telling me whether I should write on, or write no more. Forgive undue warmth, because my feelings in this matter cannot be cool; and believe me, sir, with deep respect,

"Your really *humble servant,*

P. B. Brontë."

The poetry enclosed seems to me by no means equal to parts of the letter; but, as every one likes to judge for himself, I copy the six opening stanzas —about a third of the whole, and certainly not the worst.

So where he reigns in glory bright,
Above those starry skies of night,
Amid his paradise of light
Oh, why may I not be?

Oft when awake on Christmas morn,
In sleepless twilight laid forlorn,
Strange thoughts have o"-------er my mind been borne,
How He has died for me.

And oft within my chamber lying,
Have I awaked myself with crying
From dreams, where I beheld Him dying
Upon the accursed Tree.

And often has my mother said,
While on her lap I laid my head,
She feared for time I was not made,
But for Eternity.

So “I can read my title clear,
To mansions in the skies,
And let me bid farewell to fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.”

I’ll lay me down on this marble stone,
And set the world aside,
To see upon her ebon throne
The Moon in glory ride.

Soon after Charlotte returned to Dewsbury Moor, she was distressed by hearing that her friend E. was likely to leave the neighbourhood for a considerable length of time.

“Feb. 20th.

“What shall I do without you? How long are we likely to be separated? Why are we to be denied each other’s society? It is an inscrutable fatality. I long to be with you, because it seems as if two or three days, or weeks, spent in your company would beyond measure strengthen me in the enjoyment of those feelings which I have so lately begun to cherish. You first pointed out to me that way in which I am so feebly endeavouring to travel, and now I cannot keep you by my side, I must proceed sorrowfully alone. Why are we to be divided? Surely, it must be because we are in danger of loving each other too well—of losing sight of the Creator in idolatry of the creature. At first, I could not say ‘Thy will be done!’ I felt rebellious, but I knew it was wrong to feel so. Being left a moment alone this morning, I prayed fervently to be enabled to resign myself to every decree of God’s will, though it should be dealt forth by a far severer hand than the present disappointment; since then I have felt calmer and humbler,

and consequently happier. Last Sunday I took up my Bible in a gloomy state of mind: I began to read—a feeling stole over me such as I have not known for many long years—a sweet, placid sensation, like those, I remember, which used to visit me when I was a little child, and, on Sunday evenings in summer, stood by the open window reading the life of a certain French nobleman, who attained a purer and a higher degree of sanctity than has been known since the days of the early martyrs."

E.'s residence was equally within a walk from Dewsbury Moor as it had been from Roe Head; and on Saturday afternoons both Mary and she used to call upon Charlotte, and often endeavoured to persuade her to return with them, and be the guest of one of them till Monday morning; but this was comparatively seldom. Mary says:—"She visited us twice or thrice when she was at Miss Wooler's. We used to dispute about politics and religion. She, a Tory and clergyman's daughter, was always in a minority of one in our house of violent Dissent and Radicalism. She used to hear over again, delivered with authority, all the lectures I had been used to give her at school on despotic aristocracy, mercenary priesthood, &c. She had not energy to defend herself; sometimes she owned to a little truth in it, but generally said nothing. Her feeble health gave her her yielding manner, for she could never oppose any one without gathering up all her strength for the struggle. Thus she would let me advise and patronize most imperiously, sometimes picking out any grain of sense there might be in what I said, but never allowing any one materially to interfere with her independence of thought and action. Though her silence sometimes left one under the impression that she agreed when she did not, she never gave a flattering opinion, and thus her words were golden, whether for praise or blame."

Mary's father was a man of remarkable intelligence, but of strong, not to say violent prejudices, all running in favour of Republicanism and Dissent. No other county but Yorkshire could have produced such a man. His brother had been a detenu in France, and had afterwards voluntarily taken up his residence there. Mr. T. himself had been much abroad, both on business and to see the great continental galleries of paintings. He spoke French perfectly, I have been told, when need was; but delighted usually in talking

the broadest Yorkshire. He bought splendid engravings of the pictures which he particularly admired, and his house was full of works of art and of books; but he rather liked to present his rough side to any stranger or new-comer; he would speak his broadest, bring out his opinions on Church and State in their most startling forms, and, by and by, if he found his hearer could stand the shock, he would involuntarily show his warm kind heart, and his true taste, and real refinement. His family of four sons and two daughters were brought up on Republican principles; independence of thought and action was encouraged; no “shams” tolerated. They are scattered far and wide; Martha, the younger daughter, sleeps in the Protestant cemetery at Brussels; Mary is in New Zealand; Mr. T. is dead. And so life and death have dispersed the circle of “violent Radicals and Dissenters” into which, twenty years ago, the little, quiet, resolute clergyman’s daughter was received, and by whom she was truly loved and honoured.

January and February of 1837 had passed away, and still there was no reply from Southey. Probably she had lost expectation and almost hope when at length, in the beginning of March, she received the letter inserted in Mr. C. C. Southey’s life of his Father, Vol. VI., p. 327.

After accounting for his delay in replying to hers by the fact of a long absence from home, during which his letters had accumulated, whence “it has lain unanswered till the last of a numerous file, not from disrespect or indifference to its contents, but because in truth it is not an easy task to answer it, nor a pleasant one to cast a damp over the high spirits and the generous desires of youth,” he goes on to say: “What you are I can only infer from your letter, which appears to be written in sincerity, though, I may suspect that you have used a fictitious signature. Be that as it may, the letter and the verses bear the same stamp, and I can well understand the state of mind they indicate.”

* * * * * *

“It is not my advice that you have asked as to the direction of your talents, but my opinion of them, and yet the opinion may be worth little, and the

advice much. You evidently possess, and in no inconsiderable degree, what Wordsworth calls the ‘faculty of verse.’ I am not depreciating it when I say that in these times it is not rare. Many volumes of poems are now published every year without attracting public attention, any one of which, if it had appeared half a century ago, would have obtained a high reputation for its author. Whoever, therefore, is ambitious of distinction in this way ought to be prepared for disappointment.

“But it is not with a view to distinction that you should cultivate this talent, if you consult your own happiness. I, who have made literature my profession, and devoted my life to it, and have never for a moment repented of the deliberate choice, think myself, nevertheless, bound in duty to caution every young man who applies as an aspirant to me for encouragement and advice, against taking so perilous a course. You will say that a woman has no need of such a caution; there can be no peril in it for her. In a certain sense this is true; but there is a danger of which I would, with all kindness and in all earnestness, warn you. The day dreams in which you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind; and in proportion as all the ordinary uses of the world seem to you flat and unprofitable, you will be unfitted for them without becoming fitted for anything else. Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for celebrity. You will not seek in imagination for excitement, of which the vicissitudes of this life, and the anxieties from which you must not hope to be exempted, be your state what it may, will bring with them but too much.

“But do not suppose that I disparage the gift which you possess; nor that I would discourage you from exercising it. I only exhort you so to think of it, and so to use it, as to render it conducive to your own permanent good. Write poetry for its own sake; not in a spirit of emulation, and not with a view to celebrity; the less you aim at that, the more likely you will be to deserve and finally to obtain it. So written, it is wholesome both for the heart and soul; it may be made the surest means, next to religion, of soothing the mind and elevating it. You may embody in it your best

thoughts and your wisest feelings, and in so doing discipline and strengthen them.

“Farewell, madam. It is not because I have forgotten that I was once young myself, that I write to you in this strain; but because I remember it. You will neither doubt my sincerity nor my good will; and however ill what has here been said may accord with your present views and temper, the longer you live the more reasonable it will appear to you. Though I may be but an ungracious adviser, you will allow me therefore, to subscribe myself, with the best wishes for your happiness here and hereafter, your true friend,

“ROBERT SOUTHEY.”

I was with Miss Brontë when she received Mr. Cuthbert Southey’s note, requesting her permission to insert the foregoing letter in his father’s life. She said to me, “Mr. Southey’s letter was kind and admirable; a little stringent, but it did me good.”

It is partly because I think it so admirable, and partly because it tends to bring out her character, as shown in the following reply, that I have taken the liberty of inserting the above extracts from it.

“March 16th.

“SIR,

. “I cannot rest till I have answered your letter, even though by addressing you a second time I should appear a little intrusive; but I must thank you for the kind and wise advice you have condescended to give me. I had not ventured to hope for such a reply; so considerate in its tone, so noble in its spirit. I must suppress what I feel, or you will think me foolishly enthusiastic.

“At the first perusal of your letter, I felt only shame and regret that I had ever ventured to trouble you with my crude rhapsody; I felt a painful heat rise to my face when I thought of the quires of paper I had covered with what once gave me so much delight, but which now was only a source of

confusion; but, after I had thought a little and read it again and again, the prospect seemed to clear. You do not forbid me to write; you do not say that what I write is utterly destitute of merit. You only warn me against the folly of neglecting real duties, for the sake of imaginative pleasures; of writing for the love of fame; for the selfish excitement of emulation. You kindly allow me to write poetry for its own sake, provided I leave undone nothing which I ought to do, in order to pursue that single, absorbing, exquisite gratification. I am afraid, sir, you think me very foolish. I know the first letter I wrote to you was all senseless trash from beginning to end; but I am not altogether the idle dreaming being it would seem to denote. My father is a clergyman of limited, though competent, income, and I am the eldest of his children. He expended quite as much in my education as he could afford in justice to the rest. I thought it therefore my duty, when I left school, to become a governess. In that capacity I find enough to occupy my thoughts all day long, and my head and hands too, without having a moment's time for one dream of the imagination. In the evenings, I confess, I do think, but I never trouble any one else with my thoughts. I carefully avoid any appearance of pre-occupation and eccentricity, which might lead those I live amongst to suspect the nature of my pursuits. Following my father's advice —who from my childhood has counselled me just in the wise and friendly tone of your letter—I have endeavoured not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself; and my father's approbation amply rewarded me for the privation. Once more allow me to thank you with sincere gratitude. I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print; if the wish should rise I'll look at Southey's letter, and suppress it. It is honour enough for me that I have written to him, and received an answer. That letter is consecrated; no one shall ever see it, but papa and my brother and sisters. Again I thank you. This incident, I suppose, will be renewed no more; if I live to be an old woman, I shall remember it thirty years hence as a bright dream. The signature which you suspected of being fictitious is my real name. Again, therefore, I must sign myself,

"C BRONTË."

“P. S.—Pray, sir, excuse me for writing to you a second time; I could not help writing, partly to tell you how thankful I am for your kindness, and partly to let you know that your advice shall not be wasted; however sorrowfully and reluctantly it may be at first followed. “C B.”

I cannot deny myself the gratification of inserting Southey’s reply:—

“Keswick, March 22, 1837.

“DEAR MADAM,

“Your letter has given me great pleasure, and I should not forgive myself if I did not tell you so. You have received admonition as considerately and as kindly as it was given. Let me now request that, if you ever should come to these lakes while I am living here, you will let me see you. You would then think of me afterwards with the more goodwill, because you would perceive that there is neither severity nor moroseness in the state of mind to which years and observation have brought me.

“It is, by God’s mercy, in our power to attain a degree of self-government, which is essential to our own happiness, and contributes greatly to that of those around us. Take care of over-excitement, and endeavour to keep a quiet mind (even for your health it is the best advice that can be given you): your moral and spiritual improvement will then keep pace with the culture of your intellectual powers.

“And now, Madam, God bless you!

“Farewell, and believe me to be your sincere friend,

“ROBERT SOUTHEY.”

Of this second letter also she spoke, and told me that it contained an invitation for her to go and see the poet if ever she visited the Lakes. “But there was no money to spare,” said she, “nor any prospect of my ever earning money enough to have the chance of so great a pleasure, so I gave up thinking of it.” At the time we conversed together on the subject we were at the Lakes. But Southey was dead.

This “stringent” letter made her put aside, for a time, all idea of literary enterprise. She bent her whole energy towards the fulfilment of the duties in hand; but her occupation was not sufficient food for her great forces of intellect, and they cried out perpetually, “Give, give,” while the flat and comparatively stagnant air of Dewsbury Moor told upon her health and spirits more and more. On August 27, 1837, she writes:—

“I am again at Dewsbury, engaged in the old business,—teach, teach, teach.... When will you come home? Make haste! You have been at Bath long enough for all purposes; by this time you have acquired polish enough, I am sure; if the varnish is laid on much thicker, I am afraid the good wood underneath will be quite concealed, and your Yorkshire friends won’t stand that. Come, come. I am getting really tired of your absence. Saturday after Saturday comes round, and I can have no hope of hearing your knock at the door, and then being told that ‘Miss E. is come.’ Oh dear! in this monotonous life of mine, that was a pleasant event. I wish it would recur again; but it will take two or three interviews before the stiffness—the estrangement of this long separation—will wear away”

About this time she forgot to return a work-bag she had borrowed, by a messenger, and in repairing her error she says:—“These aberrations of memory warn me pretty intelligibly that I am getting past my prime.” *Ætat.* 21! And the same tone of despondency runs through the following letter:—

“I wish exceedingly that I could come to you before Christmas, but it is impossible; another three weeks must elapse before I shall again have my

comforter beside me, under the roof of my own dear quiet home. If I could always live with you, and daily read the Bible with you—if your lips and mine could at the same time drink the same draught, from the same pure fountain of mercy—I hope, I trust, I might one day become better, far better than my evil, wandering thoughts, my corrupt heart, cold to the spirit and warm to the flesh, will now permit me to be. I often plan the pleasant life which we might lead together, strengthening each other in that power of self derxial, that hallowed and glowing devotion, which the first saints of God often attained to. My eyes fill with tears when I contrast the bliss of such a state, brightened by hopes of the future, with the melancholy state I now live in, uncertain that I ever felt true contrition, wandering in thought and deed, longing for holiness, which I shall never, never obtain, smitten at times to the heart with the conviction that ghastly Calvinistic doctrines are true—darkened, in short, by the very shadows of spiritual death. If Christian perfection be necessary to salvation, I shall never be saved; my heart is a very hot-bed for sinful thoughts, and when I decide on an action I scarcely remember to look to my Redeemer for direction. I know not how to pray; I cannot bend my life to the grand end of doing good; I go on constantly seeking my own pleasure, pursuing the gratification of my own desires. I forget God, and will not God forget me? And, meantime, I know the greatness of Jehovah; I acknowledge the perfection of His word; I adore the purity of the Christian faith; my theory is right, my practice horribly wrong."

The Christmas holidays came, and she and Anne returned to the parsonage, and to that happy home circle in which alone their natures expanded; amongst all other people they shrivelled up more or less. Indeed, there were only one or two strangers who could be admitted among the sisters without producing the same result. Emily and Anne were bound up in their lives and interests like twins. The former from reserve, the latter from timidity, avoided all friendships and intimacies beyond their sisters. Emily was impervious to influence; she never came in contact with public opinion, and her own decision of what was right and fitting was a law for her conduct and appearance, with which she allowed no one to interfere.

Her love was poured out on Anne, as Charlotte's was on her. But the affection among all the three was stronger than either death or life.

E. was eagerly welcomed by Charlotte, freely admitted by Emily, and kindly received by Anne, whenever she could come amongst them; and this Christmas she had promised to visit Haworth, but her coming had to be delayed on account of a little domestic accident detailed in the following letter:—

"Dec. 29, 1837.

"I am sure you will have thought me very remiss, in not sending my promised letter long before now; but I have a sufficient and very melancholy excuse in an accident that befell our old faithful Tabby, a few days after my return home. She was gone out into the village on some errand, when, as she was descending the steep street, her foot slipped on the ice, and she fell; it was dark, and no one saw her mischance, till after a time her groans attracted the attention of a passer-by. She was lifted up and carried into the druggist's near; and, after the examination, it was discovered that she had completely shattered and dislocated one leg. Unfortunately, the fracture could not be set till six o'clock the next morning, as no surgeon was to be had before that time, and she now lies at our house in a very doubtful and dangerous state. Of course we are all exceedingly distressed at the circumstance, for she was like one of our own family. Since the event we have been almost without assistance—a person has dropped in now and then to do the drudgery, but we have as yet been able to procure no regular servant; and consequently, the whole work of the house, as well as the additional duty of nursing Tabby, falls on ourselves. Under these circumstances I dare not press your visit here, at least until she is pronounced out of danger; it would be too selfish of me. Aunt wished me to give you this information before, but papa and all the rest were anxious I should delay until we saw whether matters took a more settled aspect, and I myself kept putting it off from day to day, most bitterly reluctant to give up all the pleasure I had anticipated so long. However, remembering what you told me, namely, that you had commended the matter to a higher decision than ours, and that you were resolved to submit with resignation to that

decision, whatever it might be, I hold it my duty to yield also, and to be silent; it may be all for the best. I fear, if you had been here during this severe weather, your visit would have been of no advantage to you, for the moors are blockaded with snow, and you would never have been able to get out. After this disappointment, I never dare reckon with certainty on the enjoyment of a pleasure again; it seems as if some fatality stood between you and me. I am not good enough for you, and you must be kept from the contamination of too intimate society. I would urge your visit yet—I would entreat and press it—but the thought comes across me, should Tabby die while you are in the house, I should never forgive myself. No! it must not be, and in a thousand ways the consciousness of that mortifies and disappoints me most keenly. And I am not the only one who is disappointed. All in the house were looking to your visit with eagerness. Papa says he highly approves of my friendship with you, and he wishes me to continue it through life."

A good neighbour of the Brontes—a clever, intelligent Yorkshire woman, who keeps a druggist's shop in Haworth, and from her occupation, her experience, and excellent sense, holds the position of village doctress and nurse, and, as such, has been a friend, in many a time of trial, and sickness, and death, in the households round—told me a characteristic little incident connected with Tabby's fractured leg. Mr. Brontë is truly generous and regardful of all deserving claims. Tabby had lived with them for ten or twelve years, and was, as Charlotte expressed it, "one of the family." But, on the other hand, she was past the age for any very active service, being nearer seventy than sixty at the time of the accident; she had a sister living in Haworth; and the savings she had accumulated, during many years' service, formed a competency for one in her rank of life. Or if, in this time of sickness, she fell short of any comforts which her state rendered necessary, the parsonage could supply them. So reasoned Miss Branwell, the prudent, not to say anxious aunt; looking to the limited contents of Mr. Brontë's purse, and the unprovided-for future of her nieces; who were, moreover, losing the relaxation of the holidays, in close attendance upon Tabby.

Miss Branwell urged her views upon Mr. Brontë as soon as the immediate danger to the old servant's life was over. He refused at first to listen to the careful advice; it was repugnant to his liberal nature. But Miss Branwell persevered; urged economical motives; pressed on his love for his daughters. He gave way. Tabby was to be removed to her sister's and there nursed and cared for, Mr. Brontë coming in with his aid when her own resources fell short. This decision was communicated to the girls. There were symptoms of a quiet, but sturdy rebellion, that winter afternoon, in the small precincts of Haworth Parsonage. They made one unanimous and stiff remonstrance. Tabby had tended them in their childhood; they, and none other, should tend her in her infirmity and age. At tea-time, they were sad and silent, and the meal went away untouched by any of the three. So it was at breakfast; they did not waste many words on the subject, but each word they did utter was weighty. They "struck" eating till the resolution was rescinded, and Tabby was allowed to remain a helpless invalid entirely dependent upon them. Herein was the strong feeling of Duty being paramount to Pleasure, which lay at the foundation of Charlotte's character, made most apparent; for we have seen how she yearned for her friend's company; but it was to be obtained only by shrinking from what she esteemed right, and that she never did, whatever might be the sacrifice.

She had another weight on her mind this Christmas. I have said that Dewsbury Moor was low and damp, and that the air did not agree with her, though she herself was hardly aware how much her life there was affecting her health. But Anne had begun to suffer just before the holidays, and Charlotte watched over her younger sisters with the jealous vigilance of some wild creature, that changes her very nature if danger threatens her young. Anne had a slight cough, a pain at her side, a difficulty of breathing. Miss Wooler considered it as little more than a common cold; but Charlotte felt every indication of incipient consumption as a stab at her heart, remembering Maria and Elizabeth, whose places once knew them, and should know them no more.

Stung by anxiety for this little sister, she upbraided Miss Wooler for her fancied indifference to Anne's state of health. Miss Wooler felt these reproaches keenly, and wrote to Mr. Brontë about them. He immediately sent for his children, who left Dewsbury Moor the next day. Meanwhile

Charlotte had resolved that Anne should never return as a pupil, nor she herself as a governess. But, just before she left, Miss Wooler sought for the opportunity of an explanation of each other's words, and the issue proved that "the falling out of faithful friends, renewing is of love." And so ended the first, last, and only difference Charlotte ever had with good and kind Miss Wooler.

Still her heart had received a shock in the perception of Anne's delicacy; and all this winter she watched over her with the longing, fond anxiety, which is so full of sudden pangs of fear.

Miss Wooler had entreated her to return after the holidays, and she had consented. But, independently of this, Emily had given up her situation in the Halifax school, at the expiration of six months of arduous trial, on account of her health, which could only be reestablished by the bracing moorland air and free life of home. Tabby's illness had preyed on the family resources. I doubt whether Branwell was maintaining himself at this time. For some unexplained reason, he had given up the idea of becoming a student of painting at the Royal Academy, and his prospects in life were uncertain, and had yet to be settled. So Charlotte had quietly to take up her burden of teaching again, and return to her previous monotonous life.

Brave heart, ready to die in harness! She went back to her work, and made no complaint, hoping to subdue the weakness that was gaining ground upon her. About this time, she would turn sick and trembling at any sudden noise, and could hardly repress her screams when startled. This showed a fearful degree of physical weakness in one who was generally so self controlled; and the medical man, whom at length, through Miss Wooler's entreaty, she was led to consult, insisted on her return home. She had led too sedentary a life, he said; and the soft summer air, blowing round her home, the sweet company of those she loved, the release, the freedom of life in her own family, were needed, to save either reason or life. So, as One higher than she had overruled that for a time she might relax her strain, she returned to Haworth; and after a season of utter quiet, her father sought for her the enlivening society of her two friends, Mary and Martha T. At the conclusion of the following letter, there is, I think, as pretty a glimpse of a merry group of young people as need be; and like all descriptions of doing, as distinct

from thinking or feeling, in letters, it saddens one in proportion to the vivacity of the picture of what was once, and is now utterly swept away.

"Haworth, June 9, 1838.

"I received your packet of despatches on Wednesday; it was brought me by Mary and Martha, who have been staying at Haworth for a few days; they leave us to-day. You will be surprised at the date of this letter. I ought to be at Dewsbury Moor, you know; but I stayed as long as I was able, and at length I neither could nor dared stay any longer. My health and spirits had utterly failed me, and the medical man whom I consulted enjoined me, as I valued my life, to go home. So home I went, and the change has at once roused and soothed me; and I am now, I trust, fairly in the way to be myself again.

"A calm and even mind like yours cannot conceive the feelings of the shattered wretch who is now writing to you, when, after weeks of mental and bodily anguish not to be described, something like peace began to dawn again. Mary is far from well. She breathes short, has a pain in her chest, and frequent flushings of fever. I cannot tell you what agony these symptoms give me; they remind me too strongly of my two sisters, whom no power of medicine could save. Martha is now very well; she has kept in a continual flow of good humour during her stay here, and has consequently been very fascinating.....

"They are making such a noise about me I cannot write any more. Mary is playing on the piano; Martha is chattering as fast as her little tongue can run; and Branwell is standing before her, laughing at her vivacity."

Charlotte grew much stronger in this quiet, happy period at home. She paid occasional visits to her two great friends, and they in turn came to Haworth. At one of their houses, I suspect, she met with the person to whom the following letter refers; some one having a slight resemblance to the character of "St. John," in the last volume of "Jane Eyre," and, like him, in holy orders.[8]

“March 12, 1839.

.... “I had a kindly leaning towards him, because he is an amiable and well-disposed man. Yet I had not, and could not have, that intense attachment which would make me willing to die for him; and if ever I marry, it must be in that light of adoration that I will regard my husband. Ten to one I shall never have the chance again; but n’importe. Moreover, I was aware that he knew so little of me he could hardly be conscious to whom he was writing. Why! it would startle him to see me in my natural home character; he would think I was a wild, romantic, enthusiast indeed. I could not sit all day long making a grave face before my husband. I would laugh, and satirize, and say whatever came into my head first. And if he were a clever man, and loved me, the whole world, weighed in the balance against his smallest wish, should be light as air.”

So that—her first proposal of marriage—was quietly declined and put on one side. Matrimony did not enter into the scheme of her life, but good, sound, earnest labour did; the question, however, was as yet undecided in what direction she should employ her forces. She had been discouraged in literature; her eyes failed her in the minute kind of drawing which she practised when she wanted to express an idea; teaching seemed to her at this time, as it does to most women at all times, the only way of earning an independent livelihood. But neither she nor her sisters were naturally fond of children. The hieroglyphics of childhood were an unknown language to them, for they had never been much with those younger than themselves. I am inclined to think, too, that they had not the happy knack of imparting information, which seems to be a separate gift from the faculty of acquiring it; a kind of sympathetic tact, which instinctively perceives the difficulties that impede comprehension in a child’s mind, and that yet are too vague and unformed for it, with its half-developed powers of expression, to explain by words. Consequently, teaching very young children was anything but a “delightful task” to the three Brontë sisters. With older girls, verging on womanhood, they might have done better, especially if these had any desire for improvement. But the education which the village clergyman’s daughters had received, did not as yet qualify them to undertake the charge

of advanced pupils. They knew but little French, and were not proficients in music; I doubt whether Charlotte could play at all. But they were all strong again, and, at any rate, Charlotte and Anne must put their shoulders to the wheel. One daughter was needed at home, to stay with Mr. Brontë and Miss Branwell; to be the young and active member in a household of four, whereof three—the father, the aunt, and faithful Tabby—were past middle age. And Emily, who suffered and drooped more than her sisters when away from Haworth, was the one appointed to remain. Anne was the first to meet with a situation.

"April 15th, 1839.

"I could not write to you in the week you requested, as about that time we were very busy in preparing for Anne's departure.[9] Poor child! she left us last Monday; no one went with her; it was her own wish that she might be allowed to go alone, as she thought she could manage better, and summon more courage, if thrown entirely upon her own resources. We have had one letter from her since she went. She expresses herself very well satisfied, and says that Mrs.—is extremely kind; the two eldest children alone are under her care, the rest are confined to the nursery, with which and its occupants she has nothing to do.... I hope she'll do. You would be astonished what a sensible, clever letter she writes; it is only the talking part that I fear. But I do seriously apprehend that Mrs.—will sometimes conclude that she has a natural impediment in her speech. For my own part, I am as yet 'wanting a situation' like a housemaid out of place. By the way, I have lately discovered I have quite a talent for cleaning, sweeping up hearths, dusting rooms, making beds, &c.; so, if everything else fails, I can turn my hand to that, if anybody will give me good wages for little labor. I won't be a cook; I hate cooking. I won't be a nurserymaid, nor a lady's maid, far less a lady's companion, or a mantua-maker, or a straw-bonnet maker, or a taker-in of plain work. I won't be anything but a housemaid..... With regard to my visit to G., I have as yet received no invitation; but if I should be asked, though I should feel it a great act of self-denial to refuse, yet I have almost made up my mind to do so, though the society of the Ts is one of the most rousing pleasures I have ever known. Good-bye, my darling E., &c.

“P. S.—Strike out that word ‘darling;’ it is humbug. Where’s the use of protestations? We’ve known each other, and liked each other, a good while; that’s enough.”

Not many weeks after this was written, Charlotte also became engaged as a governess.[10] I intend carefully to abstain from introducing the names of any living people, respecting whom I may have to tell unpleasant truths, or to quote severe remarks from Miss Brontë’s letters; but it is necessary that the difficulties she had to encounter in her various phases of life, should be fairly and frankly made known, before the force “of what was resisted” can be at all understood. I was once speaking to her about “Agnes Grey”—the novel in which her sister Anne pretty literally describes her own experience as a governess—and alluding more particularly to the account of the stoning of the little nestlings in the presence of the parent birds. She said that none but those who had been in the position of a governess could ever realize the dark side of “respectable” human nature; under no great temptation to crime, but daily giving way to selfishness and ill-temper, till its conduct towards those dependent on it sometimes amounts to a tyranny of which one would rather be the victim than the inflicter. We can only trust in such cases that the employers err rather from a density of perception and an absence of sympathy, than from any natural cruelty of disposition. Among several things of the same kind, which I well remember, she told me what had once occurred to herself. She had been entrusted with the care of a little boy, three or four years old, during the absence of his parents on a day’s excursion, and particularly enjoined to keep him out of the stable-yard. His elder brother, a lad of eight or nine, and not a pupil of Miss Brontë‘s, tempted the little fellow into the forbidden place. She followed, and tried to induce him to come away; but, instigated by his brother, he began throwing stones at her, and one of them hit her so severe a blow on the temple that the lads were alarmed into obedience. The next day, in full family conclave, the mother asked Miss Brontë what occasioned the mark on her forehead. She simply replied, “An accident, ma’am,” and no further inquiry was made; but the children (both brothers and sisters) had been present, and honoured her for not “telling tales.” From that time, she began to gain

influence over all, more or less, according to their different characters; and as she insensibly gained their affection, her own interest in them was increasing. But one day, at the children's dinner, the small truant of the stable-yard, in a little demonstrative gush, said, putting his hand in hers, "I love 'ou, Miss Brontë." Whereupon, the mother exclaimed, before all the children, "Love the governess, my dear!"

The family into which she first entered was, I believe, that of a wealthy Yorkshire manufacturer. The following extracts from her correspondence at this time will show how painfully the restraint of her new mode of life pressed upon her. The first is from a letter to Emily, beginning with one of the tender expressions in which, in spite of "humbug," she indulged herself. "Mine dear love," "Mine bonnie love," are her terms of address to this beloved sister.

"June 8th, 1839.

"I have striven hard to be pleased with my new situation. The country, the house and the grounds are, as I have said, divine; but, alack-a-day, there is such a thing as seeing all beautiful around you—pleasant woods, white paths, green lawns, and blue sunshiny sky—and not having a free moment or a free thought left to enjoy them. The children are constantly with me. As for correcting them, I quickly found that was out of the question; they are to do as they like. A complaint to the mother only brings black looks on myself, and unjust, partial excuses to screen the children. I have tried that plan once, and succeeded so notably, I shall try no more. I said in my last letter that Mrs.—did not know me. I now begin to find she does not intend to know me; and she cares nothing about me, except to contrive how the greatest possible quantity of labour may be got out of me; and to that end she overwhelms me with oceans of needlework; yards of cambric to hem, muslin nightcaps to make, and, above all things, dolls to dress. I do not think she likes me at all, because I can't help being shy in such an entirely novel scene, surrounded as I have hitherto been by strange and constantly changing faces..... I used to think I should like to be in the stir of grand folks' society; but I have had enough of it—it is dreary work to look on and listen. I see more clearly than I have ever done before, that a private

governess has no existence, is not considered as a living rational being, except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil..... One of the pleasantest afternoons I have spent here—indeed, the only one at all pleasant—was when Mr.—walked out with his children, and I had orders to follow a little behind. As he strolled on through his fields, with his magnificent Newfoundland dog at his side, he looked very like what a frank, wealthy, Conservative gentleman ought to be. He spoke freely and unaffectedly to the people he met, and, though he indulged his children and allowed them to tease himself far too much, he would not suffer them grossly to insult others."

(Written In Pencil to a Friend.)

"July, 1839.

"I cannot procure ink, without going into the drawing-room, where I do not wish to go..... I should have written to you long since, and told you every detail of the utterly new scene into which I have lately been cast, had I not been daily expecting a letter from yourself, and wondering and lamenting that you did not write; for you will remember it was your turn. I must not bother you too much with my sorrows, of which, I fear, you have heard an exaggerated account. If you were near me, perhaps I might be tempted to tell you all, to grow egotistical, and pour out the long history of a private governess's trials and crosses in her first situation. As it is, I will only ask you to imagine the miseries of a reserved wretch like me, thrown at once into the midst of a large family—proud as peacocks and wealthy as Jews—at a time when they were particularly gay—when the house was filled with company—all strangers—people whose faces I had never seen before. In this state I had charge given me of a set of pampered, spoilt, turbulent children, whom I was expected constantly to amuse, as well as to instruct. I soon found that the constant demand on my stock of animal spirits reduced them to the lowest state of exhaustion; at times I felt—and, I suppose, seemed—depressed. To my astonishment, I was taken to task on the subject by Mrs.—, with a sternness of manner and a harshness of language scarcely credible; like a fool, I cried most bitterly. I could not help it; my spirits quite failed me at first. I thought I had done my best—strained every nerve to

please her; and to be treated in that way, merely because I was shy and sometimes melancholy, was too bad. At first I was for giving all up and going home. But, after a little reflection, I determined to summon what energy I had, and to weather the storm. I said to myself, ‘I have never yet quitted a place without gaining a friend; adversity is a good school; the poor are born to labour, and the dependent to endure.’ I resolved to be patient, to command my feelings, and to take what came; the ordeal, I reflected, would not last many weeks, and I trusted it would do me good. I recollected the fable of the willow and the oak; I bent quietly, and now, I trust, the storm is blowing over me. Mrs.—is generally considered an agreeable woman; so she is, I doubt not, in general society. Her health is sound, her animal spirits good, consequently she is cheerful in company; but, oh! does this compensate for the absence of every fine feeling—of every gentle and delicate sentiment? She behaves somewhat more civilly to me now than she did at first, and the children are a little more manageable; but she does not know my character, and she does not wish to know it. I have never had five minutes’ conversation with her since I came, except while she was scolding me. I have no wish to be pitied, except by yourself; if I were talking to you I could tell you much more.”

(To Emily, About This Time.)

“Mine bonnie love, I was as glad of your letter as tongue can express: it is a real, genuine pleasure to hear from home; a thing to be saved till bed-time, when one has a moment’s quiet and rest to enjoy it thoroughly. Write whenever you can. I could like to be at home. I could like to work in a mill. I could like to feel some mental liberty. I could like this weight of restraint to be taken off. But the holidays will come. Coraggio.”

Her temporary engagement in this uncongenial family ended in the July of this year; not before the constant strain upon her spirits and strength had again affected her health: but when this delicacy became apparent in palpitations and shortness of breathing, it was treated as affectation—as a phase of imaginary indisposition, which could be dissipated by a good

scolding. She had been brought up rather in a school of Spartan endurance than in one of maudlin self-indulgence, and could bear many a pain and relinquish many a hope in silence.

After she had been at home about a week, a proposal was made to her to accompany her friend in some little excursion, having pleasure alone for its object. She caught at the idea most eagerly at first; but her hope stood still, waned, and had almost disappeared before, after many delays, it was realized. In its fulfilment at last, it was a favourable specimen of many a similar air-bubble dancing before her eyes in her brief career, in which stern realities, rather than pleasures, formed the leading incidents.

"July 26th, 1839.

"Your proposal has almost driven me 'clean daft'—if you don't understand that ladylike expression, you must ask me what it means when I see you. The fact is, an excursion with you anywhere,—whether to Cleathorpe or Canada,—just by ourselves, would be to me most delightful. I should, indeed, like to go; but I can't get leave of absence for longer than a week, and I'm afraid that would not suit you—must I then give it up entirely? I feel as if I could not; I never had such a chance of enjoyment before; I do want to see you and talk to you, and be with you. When do you wish to go? Could I meet you at Leeds? To take a gig from Haworth to B., would be to me a very serious increase of expense, and I happen to be very low in cash. Oh! rich people seem to have many pleasures at their command which we are debarred from! However, no repining.

"Say when you go, and I shall be able in my answer to say decidedly whether I can accompany you or not. I must—I will—I'm set upon it—I'll be obstinate and bear down all opposition."

"P. S.—Since writing the above, I find that aunt and papa have determined to go to Liverpool for a fortnight, and take us all with them. It is stipulated, however, that I should give up the Cleathorpe scheme. I yield reluctantly."

I fancy that, about this time, Mr. Brontë found it necessary, either from his failing health or the increased populousness of the parish, to engage the assistance of a curate.[11] At least, it is in a letter written this summer that I find mention of the first of a succession of curates, who henceforward revolved around Haworth Parsonage, and made an impression on the mind of one of its inmates which she has conveyed pretty distinctly to the world. The Haworth curate brought his clerical friends and neighbours about the place, and for a time the incursions of these, near the parsonage tea-time, formed occurrences by which the quietness of the life there was varied, sometimes pleasantly, sometimes disagreeably. The little adventure recorded at the end of the following letter is unusual in the lot of most women, and is a testimony in this case to the unusual power of attraction—though so plain in feature—which Charlotte possessed, when she let herself go in the happiness and freedom of home.

"August 4th, 1839.

"The Liverpool journey is yet a matter of talk, a sort of castle in the air; but, between you and me, I fancy it is very doubtful whether it will ever assume a more solid shape. Aunt—like many other elderly people—likes to talk of such things; but when it comes to putting them into actual execution, she rather falls off. Such being the case, I think you and I had better adhere to our first plan of going somewhere together, independently of other people. I have got leave to accompany you for a week—at the utmost a fortnight—but no more. Where do you wish to go? Burlington, I should think, from what M. says, would be as eligible a place as any. When do you set off? Arrange all these things according to your convenience; I shall start no objections. The idea of seeing the sea—of being near it—watching its changes by sunrise, sunset, moonlight, and noon-day-in calm, perhaps in storm—fills and satisfies my mind. I shall be discontented at nothing. And then I am not to be with a set of people with whom I have nothing in common—who would be nuisances and bores; but with you, whom I like and know, and who know me. I have an odd circumstance to relate to you: prepare for a hearty laugh! The other day, Mr.—, a vicar, came to spend the day with us, bringing with him his own curate.[12] The latter gentleman, by

name Mr. B., is a young Irish clergyman, fresh from Dublin University. It was the first time we had any of us seen him, but, however, after the manner of his countrymen, he soon made himself at home. His character quickly appeared in his conversation; witty, lively, ardent, clever too; but deficient in the dignity and discretion of an Englishman. At home, you know, I talk with ease, and am never shy—never weighed down and oppressed by that miserable mauvaise honte which torments and constrains me elsewhere. So I conversed with this Irishman, and laughed at his jests; and, though I saw faults in his character, excused them because of the amusement his originality afforded. I cooled a little, indeed, and drew in towards the latter part of the evening, because he began to season his conversation with something of Hibernian flattery, which I did not quite relish. However, they went away, and no more was thought about them. A few days after I got a letter, the direction of which puzzled me, it being in a hand I was not accustomed to see. Evidently, it was neither from you nor Mary, my only correspondents. Having opened and read it, it proved to be a declaration of attachment and proposal of matrimony, expressed in the ardent language of the sapient young Irishman! I hope you are laughing heartily. This is not like one of my adventures, is it? It more nearly resembles Martha's. I am certainly doomed to be an old maid. Never mind. I made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years old.

"Well! thought I, I have heard of love at first sight, but this beats all! I leave you to guess what my answer would be, convinced that you will not do me the injustice of guessing wrong."

On the 14th of August, she still writes from Haworth:—

"I have in vain packed my box, and prepared everything for our anticipated journey. It so happens that I can get no conveyance this week or the next. The only gig let out to hire in Haworth, is at Harrogate, and likely to remain there, for aught I can hear. Papa decidedly objects to my going by the coach, and walking to B., though I am sure I could manage it. Aunt exclaims against the weather, and the roads, and the four winds of heaven, so I am in a fix, and, what is worse, so are you. On reading over, for the

second or third time, your last letter (which, by the by, was written in such hieroglyphics that, at the first hasty perusal, I could hardly make out two consecutive words), I find you intimate that if I leave this journey till Thursday I shall be too late. I grieve that I should have so inconvenienced you; but I need not talk of either Friday or Saturday now, for I rather imagine there is small chance of my ever going at all. The elders of the house have never cordially acquiesced in the measure; and now that impediments seem to start up at every step, opposition grows more open. Papa, indeed, would willingly indulge me, but this very kindness of his makes me doubt whether I ought to draw upon it; so, though I could battle out aunt's discontent, I yield to papa's indulgence. He does not say so, but I know he would rather I stayed at home; and aunt meant well too, I dare say, but I am provoked that she reserved the expression of her decided disapproval till all was settled between you and myself. Reckon on me no more; leave me out in your calculations; perhaps I ought, in the beginning, to have had prudence sufficient to shut my eyes against such a prospect of pleasure, so as to deny myself the hope of it. Be as angry as you please with me for disappointing you. I did not intend it, and have only one thing more to say—if you do not go immediately to the sea, will you come to see us at Haworth? This invitation is not mine only, but papa's and aunt's."

However, a little more patience, a little more delay, and she enjoyed the pleasure she had wished for so much. She and her friend went to Easton for a fortnight in the latter part of September. It was here she received her first impressions of the sea.

"Oct. 24th.

"Have you forgotten the sea by this time, E.? Is it grown dim in your mind? Or you can still see it, dark, blue, and green, and foam-white, and hear it roaring roughly when the wind is high, or rushing softly when it is calm.... I am as well as need be, and very fat. I think of Easton very often, and of worthy Mr. H., and his kind-hearted help-mate, and of our pleasant

walks to H—Wood, and to Boynton, our merry evenings, our romps with little Hancheon, &c., &c. If we both live, this period of our lives will long be a theme for pleasant recollection. Did you chance, in your letter to Mr. H., to mention my spectacles? I am sadly inconvenienced by the want of them. I can neither read, write, nor draw with comfort in their absence. I hope Madame won't refuse to give them up..... Excuse the brevity of this letter, for I have been drawing all day, and my eyes are so tired it is quite a labour to write."

But, as the vivid remembrance of this pleasure died away, an accident occurred to make the actual duties of life press somewhat heavily for a time.

"December 21st, 1839.

"We are at present, and have been during the last month, rather busy, as, for that space of time, we have been without a servant, except a little girl to run errands. Poor Tabby became so lame that she was at length obliged to leave us. She is residing with her sister, in a little house of her own, which she bought with her savings a year or two since. She is very comfortable, and wants nothing; as she is near, we see her very often. In the mean time, Emily and I are sufficiently busy, as you may suppose: I manage the ironing, and keep the rooms clean; Emily does the baking, and attends to the kitchen. We are such odd animals, that we prefer this mode of contrivance to having a new face amongst us. Besides, we do not despair of Tabby's return, and she shall not be supplanted by a stranger in her absence. I excited aunt's wrath very much by burning the clothes, the first time I attempted to iron; but I do better now. Human feelings are queer things; I am much happier black-leading the stoves, making the beds, and sweeping the floors at home, than I should be living like a fine lady anywhere else. I must indeed drop my subscription to the Jews,[13] because I have no money to keep it up. I ought to have announced this intention to you before, but I quite forgot I was a subscriber. I intend to force myself to take another situation when I can get one, though I hate and abhor the very thoughts of governess-ship. But I must do it; and, therefore, I heartily wish I could hear of a family where they need such a commodity as a governess."

CHAPTER IX.

The year 1840 found all the Brontës living at home, except Anne. I am not aware for what reason the plan of sending Branwell to study at the Royal Academy was relinquished; probably, it was found, on inquiry, that the expenses of such a life were greater than his father's slender finances could afford, even with the help which Charlotte's labours at Miss Wooler's gave, by providing for Anne's board and education. I gather from what I have heard, that Branwell must have been severely disappointed when the plan fell through. His talents were certainly very brilliant, and of this he was fully conscious, and fervently desired, by their use, either in writing or drawing, to make himself a name. At the same time, he would probably have found his strong love of pleasure and irregular habits a great impediment in his path to fame; but these blemishes in his character were only additional reasons why he yearned after a London life, in which he imagined he could obtain every stimulant to his already vigorous intellect, while at the same time he would have a license of action to be found only in crowded cities. Thus his whole nature was attracted towards the metropolis; and many an hour must he have spent poring over the map of London, to judge from an anecdote which has been told me. Some traveller for a London house of business came to Haworth for a night; and, according to the unfortunate habit of the place, the brilliant "Patrick" (so the villagers always called him, while in his own family he was Branwell), was sent for to the inn, to beguile the evening by his intellectual conversation and his flashes of wit. They began to talk of London; of the habits and ways of life there; of the places of amusement; and Branwell informed the Londoner of one or two short cuts from point to point, up narrow lanes, or back streets; and it was only towards the end of the evening that the traveller discovered, from Branwell's voluntary confession, that his companion had never set foot in London at all.

At this time, the young man seemed to have his fate in his own hands. He was full of noble impulses, as well as of extraordinary gifts; not accustomed to resist temptation, it is true, from any higher motive than strong family affection, but showing so much power of attachment to all about him that

they took pleasure in believing that, after a time, he would “right himself,” and that they should have pride and delight in the use he would then make of his splendid talents. His aunt especially made him her great favourite. There are always peculiar trials in the life of an only boy in a family of girls. He is expected to act a part in life; to do, while they are only to be; and the necessity of their giving way to him in some things, is too often exaggerated into their giving way to him in all, and thus rendering him utterly selfish. In the family about whom I am writing, while the rest were almost ascetic in their habits, Branwell was allowed to grow up self-indulgent; but, in early youth, his power of attracting and attaching people was so great, that few came in contact with him who were not so much dazzled by him as to be desirous of gratifying whatever wishes he expressed. Of course, he was careful enough not to reveal anything before his father and sisters of the pleasures he indulged in; but his tone of thought and conversation became gradually coarser, and, for a time, his sisters tried to persuade themselves that such coarseness was a part of manliness, and to blind themselves by love to the fact that Branwell was worse than other young men. At present, though he had, they were aware, fallen into some errors, the exact nature of which they avoided knowing, still he was their hope and their darling; their pride, who should some time bring great glory to the name of Brontë.

He and his sister Charlotte were both slight and small of stature, while the other two were of taller and larger make. I have seen Branwell’s profile; it is what would be generally esteemed very handsome; the forehead is massive, the eye well set, and the expression of it fine and intellectual; the nose too is good; but there are coarse lines about the mouth, and the lips, though of handsome shape, are loose and thick, indicating self-indulgence, while the slightly retreating chin conveys an idea of weakness of will. His hair and complexion were sandy. He had enough of Irish blood in him to make his manners frank and genial, with a kind of natural gallantry about them. In a fragment of one of his manuscripts which I have read, there is a justness and felicity of expression which is very striking. It is the beginning of a tale, and the actors in it are drawn with much of the grace of characteristic portrait-painting, in perfectly pure and simple language, which distinguishes so many of Addison’s papers in the “Spectator.” [1] The

fragment is too short to afford the means of judging whether he had much dramatic talent, as the persons of the story are not thrown into conversation. But altogether the elegance and composure of style are such as one would not have expected from this vehement and ill-fated young man. He had a stronger desire for literary fame burning in his heart, than even that which occasionally flashed up in his sisters'. He tried various outlets for his talents. He wrote and sent poems to Wordsworth and Coleridge, who both expressed kind and laudatory opinions, and he frequently contributed verses to the Leeds Mercury. In 1840, he was living at home, employing himself in occasional composition of various kinds, and waiting till some employment, for which he might be fitted without any expensive course of preliminary education, should turn up; waiting, not impatiently; for he saw society of one kind (probably what he called "life") at the Black Bull; and at home he was as yet the cherished favourite.

Miss Branwell was unaware of the fermentation of unoccupied talent going on around her. She was not her nieces' confidante—perhaps no one so much older could have been; but their father, from whom they derived not a little of their adventurous spirit, was silently cognisant of much of which Miss Branwell took no note. Next to her nephew, the docile, pensive Anne was her favourite. Miss Branwell had taken charge of her from her infancy; she was always patient and tractable, and would submit quietly to occasional oppression, even when she felt it keenly. Not so her two elder sisters; they made their opinions known when roused by any injustice. At such times, Emily would express herself as strongly as Charlotte, although perhaps less frequently. But, in general, notwithstanding that Miss Branwell might be occasionally unreasonable, she and her nieces went on smoothly enough; and though they might now and then be annoyed by petty tyranny, still she inspired them with sincere respect, and not a little affection. They were, moreover, grateful to her for many habits she had enforced upon them, and which in time had become second nature: order, method, neatness in everything; a perfect knowledge of all kinds of household work; an exact punctuality, and obedience to the laws of time and place, of which no one but themselves I have heard Charlotte say, could tell the value in after life, with their impulsive natures, it was positive repose to have learnt implicit obedience to external laws. People in Haworth have assured me that,

according to the hour of day—nay, the very minute—could they have told what the inhabitants of the parsonage were about. At certain times the girls would be sewing in their aunt's bedroom—the chamber which, in former days, before they had outstripped her in their learning, had served them as a school-room; at certain (early) hours they had their meals; from six to eight, Miss Branwell read aloud to Mr. Brontë; at punctual eight, the household assembled to evening prayers in his study; and by nine he, Miss Branwell, and Tabby, were all in bed,—the girls free to pace up and down (like restless wild animals) in the parlour, talking over plans and projects, and thoughts of what was to be their future life.

At the time of which I write, the favourite idea was that of keeping a school. They thought that, by a little contrivance, and a very little additional building, a small number of pupils, four or six, might be accommodated in the parsonage. As teaching seemed the only profession open to them, and as it appeared that Emily at least could not live away from home, while the others also suffered much from the same cause, this plan of school-keeping presented itself as most desirable. But it involved some outlay; and to this their aunt was averse. Yet there was no one to whom they could apply for a loan of the requisite means, except Miss Branwell, who had made a small store out of her savings, which she intended for her nephew and nieces eventually, but which she did not like to risk. Still, this plan of school-keeping remained uppermost; and in the evenings of this winter of 1839-40, the alterations that would be necessary in the house, and the best way of convincing their aunt of the wisdom of their project, formed the principal subject of their conversation.

This anxiety weighed upon their minds rather heavily, during the months of dark and dreary weather. Nor were external events, among the circle of their friends, of a cheerful character. In January 1840, Charlotte heard of the death of a young girl who had been a pupil of hers, and a school-fellow of Anne's, at the time when the sisters were together at Roe Head; and had attached herself very strongly to the latter, who, in return, bestowed upon her much quiet affection. It was a sad day when the intelligence of this young creature's death arrived. Charlotte wrote thus on January 12th, 1840:—

“Your letter which I received this morning, was one of painful interest. Anne C., it seems, is dead; when I saw her last, she was a young, beautiful, and happy girl; and now ‘life’s fitful fever’ is over with her, and she ‘sleeps well.’ I shall never see her again. It is a sorrowful thought; for she was a warm-hearted affectionate being, and I cared for her. Wherever I seek for her now in this world, she cannot be found, no more than a flower or a leaf which withered twenty years ago. A bereavement of this kind gives one a glimpse of the feeling those must have who have seen all drop round them, friend after friend, and are left to end their pilgrimage alone. But tears are fruitless, and I try not to repine.”

During this winter, Charlotte employed her leisure hours in writing a story.[2] Some fragments of the manuscript yet remain, but it is in too small a hand to be read without great fatigue to the eyes; and one cares the less to read it, as she herself condemned it, in the preface to the “Professor,” by saying that in this story she had got over such taste as she might once have had for the “ornamental and redundant in composition.” The beginning, too, as she herself acknowledges, was on a scale commensurate with one of Richardson’s novels,[i] of seven or eight volumes. I gather some of these particulars from a copy of a letter, apparently in reply to one from Wordsworth,[j] to whom she had sent the commencement of the story, sometime in the summer of 1840.

“Authors are generally very tenacious of their productions, but I am not so much attached to this but that I can give it up without much distress. No doubt, if I had gone on, I should have made quite a Richardsonian concern of it.... I had materials in my head for half-a-dozen volumes.... Of course, it is with considerable regret I relinquish any scheme so charming as the one I have sketched. It is very edifying and profitable to create a world out of your own brains, and people it with inhabitants, who are so many Melchisedecs, and have no father nor mother but your own imagination.... I am sorry I did not exist fifty or sixty years ago, when the ‘Ladies’

Magazine' was flourishing like a green bay tree. In that case, I make no doubt, my aspirations after literary fame would have met with due encouragement, and I should have had the pleasure of introducing Messrs. Percy and West into the very best society, and recording all their sayings and doings in double-columned close-printed pages..... I recollect, when I was a child, getting hold of some antiquated volumes, and reading them by stealth with the most exquisite pleasure. You give a correct description of the patient Grisels of those days. My aunt was one of them; and to this day she thinks the tales of the 'Ladies' Magazine' infinitely superior to any trash of modern literature. So do I; for I read them in childhood, and childhood has a very strong faculty of admiration, but a very weak one of criticism..... I am pleased that you cannot quite decide whether I am an attorney's clerk or a novel-reading dressmaker. I will not help you at all in the discovery; and as to my handwriting, or the lady-like touches in my style and imagery, you must not draw any conclusion from that—I may employ an amanuensis. Seriously, sir, I am very much obliged to you for your kind and candid letter. I almost wonder you took the trouble to read and notice the novelette of an anonymous scribe, who had not even the manners to tell you whether he was a man or a woman, or whether his 'C.T.' meant Charles Timms or Charlotte Tomkins."[3]

There are two or three things noticeable in the letter from which these extracts are taken. The first is the initials with which she had evidently signed the former one to which she alludes. About this time, to her more familiar correspondents, she occasionally calls herself "Charles Thunder," making a kind of pseudonym for herself out of her Christian name, and the meaning of her Greek surname. In the next place, there is a touch of assumed smartness, very different from the simple, womanly, dignified letter which she had written to Southey, under nearly similar circumstances, three years before. I imagine the cause of this difference to be twofold. Southey, in his reply to her first letter, had appealed to the higher parts of her nature, in calling her to consider whether literature was, or was not, the best course for a woman to pursue. But the person to whom she addressed this one had evidently confined himself to purely literary criticisms; besides

which, her sense of humour was tickled by the perplexity which her correspondent felt as to whether he was addressing a man or a woman. She rather wished to encourage the former idea; and, in consequence, possibly, assumed something of the flippancy which was likely to exist in her brother's style of conversation, from whom she would derive her notions of young manhood, not likely, as far as refinement was concerned, to be improved by the other specimens she had seen, such as the curates whom she afterwards represented in "Shirley."

These curates were full of strong, High-Church feeling. Belligerent by nature, it was well for their professional character that they had, as clergymen, sufficient cause for the exercise of their warlike propensities. Mr. Brontë, with all his warm regard for Church and State, had a great respect for mental freedom; and, though he was the last man in the world to conceal his opinions, he lived in perfect amity with all the respectable part of those who differed from him. Not so the curates. Dissent was schism, and schism was condemned in the Bible. In default of turbaned Saracens, they entered on a crusade against Methodists in broadcloth; and the consequence was that the Methodists and Baptists refused to pay the church-rates. Miss Brontë thus describes the state of things at this time:—

"Little Haworth has been all in a bustle about church-rates, since you were here. We had a stirring meeting in the schoolroom. Papa took the chair, and Mr. C. and Mr. W[k] acted as his supporters, one on each side. There was violent opposition, which set Mr. C.'s Irish blood in a ferment, and if papa had not kept him quiet, partly by persuasion and partly by compulsion, he would have given the Dissenters their kale through the reek —a Scotch proverb, which I will explain to you another time. He and Mr. W both bottled up their wrath for that time, but it was only to explode with redoubled force at a future period. We had two sermons on dissent, and its consequences, preached last Sunday—one in the afternoon by Mr. W, and one in the evening by Mr. C. All the Dissenters were invited to come and hear, and they actually shut up their chapels, and came in a body; of course the church was crowded. Mr. W delivered a noble, eloquent, High-Church, Apostolical-Succession discourse, in which he banged the Dissenters most fearlessly and unflinchingly. I thought they had got enough for one while, but it was nothing to the dose that was thrust down their throats in the

evening. A keener, cleverer, bolder, and more heart-stirring harangue than that which Mr. C. delivered from Haworth pulpit, last Sunday evening, I never heard. He did not rant; he did not cant; he did not whine; he did not sniggle; he just got up and spoke with the boldness of a man who was impressed with the truth of what he was saying, who has no fear of his enemies, and no dread of consequences. His sermon lasted an hour, yet I was sorry when it was done. I do not say that I agree either with him, or with Mr. W., either in all or in half their opinions. I consider them bigoted, intolerant, and wholly unjustifiable on the ground of common sense. My conscience will not let me be either a Puseyite or a Hookist;[4] mais, if I were a Dissenter, I would have taken the first opportunity of kicking, or of horsewhipping both the gentlemen for their stern, bitter attack on my religion and its teachers. But in spite of all this, I admired the noble integrity which could dictate so fearless an opposition against so strong an antagonist.

"PS.—Mr. W has given another lecture at the Keighley Mechanics' Institution, and papa has also given a lecture; both are spoken of very highly in the newspapers, and it is mentioned as a matter of wonder that such displays of intellect should emanate from the village of Haworth, 'situated among the bogs and mountains, and, until very lately, supposed to be in a state of semi-barbarism.' Such are the words of the newspaper."

To fill up the account of this outwardly eventless year, I may add a few more extracts from the letters entrusted to me.

"May 15th, 1840.

"Do not be over-persuaded to marry a man you can never respect—I do not say love; because, I think, if you can respect a person before marriage, moderate love at least will come after; and as to intense passion, I am convinced that that is no desirable feeling. In the first place, it seldom or never meets with a requital; and, in the second place, if it did, the feeling would be only temporary; it would last the honey-moon, and then, perhaps,

give place to disgust, or indifference worse, perhaps, than disgust. Certainly this would be the case on the man's part; and on the woman's—God help her, if she is left to love passionately and alone.

"I am tolerably well convinced that I shall never marry at all. Reason tells me so, and I am not so utterly the slave of feeling but that I can occasionally hear her voice."

"June 2nd, 1840.

"M. is not yet come to Haworth; but she is to come, on the condition that I first go and stay a few days there. If all be well, I shall go next Wednesday. I may stay at G—until Friday or Saturday, and the early part of the following week I shall pass with you, if you will have me—which last sentence indeed is nonsense, for as I shall be glad to see you, so I know you will be glad to see me. This arrangement will not allow much time, but it is the only practicable one which, considering all the circumstances, I can effect. Do not urge me to stay more than two or three days, because I shall be obliged to refuse you. I intend to walk to Keighley, there to take the coach as far as B—,[1] then to get some one to carry my box, and to walk the rest of the way to G—If I manage this, I think I shall contrive very well. I shall reach B. by about five o'clock, and then I shall have the cool of the evening for the walk. I have communicated the whole arrangement to M. I desire exceedingly to see both her and you. Good-bye.

C. B.

"If you have any better plan to suggest I am open to conviction, provided your plan is practicable."

"August 20th, 1840.

"Have you seen anything of Miss H. lately? I wish they, or somebody else, would get me a situation. I have answered advertisements without number, but my applications have met with no success.

“I have got another bale of French books from G. containing upwards of forty volumes. I have read about half. They are like the rest, clever, wicked, sophistical, and immoral. The best of it is, they give one a thorough idea of France and Paris, and are the best substitute for French conversation that I have met with.

“I positively have nothing more to say to you, for I am in a stupid humour. You must excuse this letter not being quite as long as your own. I have written to you soon that you might not look after the postman in vain. Preserve this writing as a curiosity in caligraphy—I think it is exquisite—all brilliant black blots, and utterly illegible letters.

“CALIBAN.”

“ ‘ The wind bloweth where it listeth. Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth.’ That, I believe, is Scripture, though in what chapter or book, or whether it be correctly quoted, I can’t possibly say. However, it behoves me to write a letter to a young woman of the name of E., with whom I was once acquainted, ‘in life’s morning march, when my spirit was young.’ This young woman wished me to write to her some time since, though I have nothing to say—I e‘en put it off, day by day, till at last, fearing that she will ‘curse me by her gods,’ I feel constrained to sit down and tack a few lines together, which she may call a letter or not as she pleases. Now if the young woman expects sense in this production, she will find herself miserably disappointed. I shall dress her a dish of salmagundi—I shall cook a hash—compound a stew—toss up an omelette soufflée d la Française, and send it her with my respects. The wind, which is very high up in our hills of Judea, though, I suppose, down in the Philistine flats of B. parish it is nothing to speak of, has produced the same effects on the contents of my knowledge-box that a quaigh of usquebaugh does upon those of most other bipeds. I see everything couleur de rose, and am strongly inclined to dance a jig, if I knew how. I think I must partake of the nature of a pig or an ass—both which animals are strongly affected by a high wind. From what quarter the wind blows I cannot tell, for I never could in my life; but I should very much like to

know how the great brewing-tub of Bridlington Bay works, and what sort of yeasty froth rises just now on the waves.

“A woman of the name of Mrs. B., it seems, wants a teacher. I wish she would have me; and I have written to Miss W to tell her so. Verily, it is a delightful thing to live here at home, at full liberty to do just what one pleases. But I recollect some scrubby old fable about grasshoppers and ants, by a scrubby old knave yclept *Æ*sop; the grasshoppers sang all the summer, and starved all the winter.

“A distant relation of mine, one Patrick Branwell, has set off to seek his fortune in the wild, wandering, adventurous, romantic, knight-errant-like capacity of clerk on the Leeds and Manchester Railroad. Leeds and Manchester—where are they? Cities in the wilderness—like Tadmor, alias Palmyra—are they not?

“There is one little trait respecting Mr. W which lately came to my knowledge, which gives a glimpse of the better side of his character. Last Saturday night he had been sitting an hour in the parlour with papa; and, as he went away, I heard papa say to him ‘What is the matter with you? You seem in very low spirits to-night.’ ‘Oh, I don’t know. I’ve been to see a poor young girl, who, I’m afraid, is dying.’ ‘Indeed, what is her name?’ ‘Susan Bland, the daughter of John Bland, the superintendent.’ Now Susan Bland is my oldest and best scholar in the Sunday-school; and, when I heard that, I thought I would go as soon as I could to see her. I did go on Monday afternoon, and found her on her way to that ‘bourn whence no traveller returns.’ After sitting with her some time, I happened to ask her mother, if she thought a little port-wine would do her good. She replied that the doctor had recommended it, and that when Mr. W was last there, he had brought them a bottle of wine and jar of preserves. She added, that he was always good-natured to poor folks, and seemed to have a deal of feeling and kind-heartedness about him. No doubt, there are defects in his character, but there are also good qualities..... God bless him! I wonder who, with his advantages, would be without his faults. I know many of his faulty actions, many of his weak points; yet, where I am, he shall always find rather a defender than an accuser. To be sure, my opinion will go but a very little way to decide his character; what of that? People should do right as far as their ability extends. You are not to suppose from all this, that Mr. W. and I

are on very amiable terms; we are not at all. We are distant, cold, and reserved. We seldom speak; and when we do, it is only to exchange the most trivial and common-place remarks."

The Mrs. B. alluded to in this letter, as in want of a governess, entered into a correspondence with Miss Brontë, and expressed herself much pleased with the letters she received from her; with the "style and candour of the application," in which Charlotte had taken care to tell her, that if she wanted a showy, elegant, or fashionable person, her correspondent was not fitted for such a situation. But Mrs. B. required her governess to give instructions in music and singing, for which Charlotte was not qualified; and, accordingly, the negotiation fell through. But Miss Brontë was not one to sit down in despair after disappointment. Much as she disliked the life of a private governess, it was her duty to relieve her father of the burden of her support, and this was the only way open to her. So she set to advertising and inquiring with fresh vigour.

In the mean time, a little occurrence took place, described in one of her letters, which I shall give, as it shows her instinctive aversion to a particular class of men, whose vices some have supposed she looked upon with indulgence. The extract tells all that need be known, for the purpose I have in view, of the miserable pair to whom it relates.

"You remember Mr. and Mrs.—?[5] Mrs.—came here the other day, with a most melancholy tale of her wretched husband's drunken, extravagant, profligate habits. She asked papa's advice; there was nothing, she said, but ruin before them. They owed debts which they could never pay. She expected Mr.—'s instant dismissal from his curacy; she knew, from bitter experience, that his vices were utterly hopeless. He treated her and her child savagely; with much more to the same effect. Papa advised her to leave him for ever, and go home, if she had a home to go to. She said, this was what she had long resolved to do; and she would leave him directly, as soon as Mr. B. dismissed him. She expressed great disgust and contempt towards him, and did not affect to have the shadow of regard in any way. I do not

wonder at this, but I do wonder she should ever marry a man towards whom her feelings must always have been pretty much the same as they are now. I am morally certain no decent woman could experience any thing but aversion towards such a man as Mr.—. Before I knew, or suspected his character, and when I rather wondered at his versatile talents, I felt it in an uncontrollable degree. I hated to talk with him—hated to look at him; though as I was not certain that there was substantial reason for such a dislike, and thought it absurd to trust to mere instinct, I both concealed and repressed the feeling as much as I could; and, on all occasions, treated him with as much civility as I was mistress of. I was struck with Mary's expression of a similar feeling at first sight; she said, when we left him, 'That is a hideous man, Charlotte!' I thought 'he is indeed.' "

CHAPTER X.

Early in March, 1841, Miss Brontë obtained her second and last situation as a governess. This time she esteemed herself fortunate in becoming a member of a kind-hearted and friendly household. The master of it, she especially regarded as a valuable friend, whose advice helped to guide her in one very important step of her life. But as her definite acquirements were few, she had to eke them out by employing her leisure time in needle-work; and altogether her position was that of “bonne” or nursery governess, liable to repeated and never-ending calls upon her time. This description of uncertain, yet perpetual employment, subject to the exercise of another person’s will at all hours of the day, was peculiarly trying to one whose life at home had been full of abundant leisure. Idle she never was in any place, but of the multitude of small talks, plans, duties, pleasures, &c., that make up most people’s days, her home life was nearly destitute. This made it possible for her to go through long and deep histories of feeling and imagination, for which others, odd as it sounds, have rarely time. This made it inevitable that—late on, in her too short career—the intensity of her feelings should wear out her physical health. The habit of “making out,” which had grown with her growth, and strengthened with her strength, had become a part of her nature. Yet all exercise of her strongest and most characteristic faculties was now out of the question. She could not (as while she was at Miss Wooler’s) feel amidst the occupations of the day, that when evening came, she might employ herself in more congenial ways. No doubt, all who enter upon the career of a governess have to relinquish much; no doubt, it must ever be a life of sacrifice; but to Charlotte Brontë it was a perpetual attempt to force all her faculties into a direction for which the whole of her previous life had unfitted them. Moreover the little Brontës had been brought up motherless; and from knowing nothing of the gaiety and the sportiveness of childhood—from never having experienced caresses or fond attentions themselves—they were ignorant of the very nature of infancy, or how to call out its engaging qualities. Children were to them the troublesome necessities of humanity; they had never been drawn into contact with them in any other way. Years afterwards, when Miss Brontë

came to stay with us, she watched our little girls perpetually; and I could not persuade her that they were only average specimens of well brought up children. She was surprised and touched by any sign of thoughtfulness for others, of kindness to animals, or of unselfishness on their part; and constantly maintained that she was in the right, and I in the wrong, when we differed on the point of their unusual excellence. All this must be borne in mind while reading the following letters. And it must likewise be borne in mind—by those who, surviving her, look back upon her life from their mount of observation,—how no distaste, no suffering ever made her shrink from any course which she believed it to be her duty to engage in.

"*March 3*, 1841

"I told you some time since, that I meant to get a situation, and when I said so my resolution was quite fixed. I felt that however often I was disappointed, I had no intention of relinquishing my efforts. After being severely baffled two or three times,—after a world of trouble in the way of correspondence and interviews,—I have at length succeeded, and am fairly established in my new place.

* * * * * *

"The house is not very large, but exceedingly comfortable and well regulated; the grounds are fine and extensive. In taking the place, I have made a large sacrifice in the way of salary, in the hope of securing comfort, —by which word I do not mean to express good eating and drinking, or warm fire, or a soft bed, but the society of cheerful faces, and minds and hearts not dug out of a lead-mine, or cut from a marble quarry. My salary is not really more than 161. per annum, though it is nominally 201., but the expense of washing will be deducted therefrom. My pupils are two in number, a girl of eight, and a boy of six. As to my employers, you will not expect me to say much about their characters when I tell you that I only arrived here yesterday. I have not the faculty of telling an individual's disposition at first sight. Before I can venture to pronounce on a character, I must see it first under various lights and from various points of view. All I

can say therefore is, both Mr. and Mrs.—[1] seem to me good sort of people. I have as yet had no cause to complain of want of considerateness or civility. My pupils are wild and unbroken, but apparently well-disposed. I wish I may be able to say as much next time I write to you. My earnest wish and endeavour will be to please them. If I can but feel that I am giving satisfaction, and if at the same time I can keep my health, I shall, I hope, be moderately happy. But no one but myself can tell how hard a governess's work is to me—for no one but myself is aware how utterly averse my whole mind and nature are for the employment. Do not think that I fail to blame myself for this, or that I leave any means unemployed to conquer this feeling. Some of my greatest difficulties lie in things that would appear to you comparatively trivial. I find it so hard to repel the rude familiarity of children. I find it so difficult to ask either servants or mistress for anything I want, however much I want it. It is less pain for me to endure the greatest inconvenience than to go into the kitchen to request its removal. I am a fool. Heaven knows I cannot help it!

"Now can you tell me whether it is considered improper for governesses to ask their friends to come and see them, I do not mean, of course, to stay, but just for a call of an hour or two? If it is not absolute treason, I do fervently request that you will contrive, in some way or other, to let me have a sight of your face. Yet I feel, at the same time, that I am making a very foolish and almost impracticable demand; yet this is only four miles from B—!"

"March 21.

"You must excuse a very short answer to your most welcome letter; for my time is entirely occupied. Mrs.—expected a good deal of sewing from me. I cannot sew much during the day, on account of the children, who require the utmost attention. I am obliged, therefore, to devote the evenings to this business. Write to me often; very long letters. It will do both of us good. This place is far better than —, but, God knows, I have enough to do to keep a good heart in the matter. What you said has cheered me a little. I

wish I could always act according to your advice. Home-sickness affects me sorely. I like Mr.—extremely. The children are over-indulged, and consequently hard at times to manage. Do, do, do come and see me; if it be a breach of etiquette, never mind. If you can only stop an hour, come. Talk no more about my forsaking you; my darling, I could not afford to do it. I find it is not in my nature to get on in this weary world without sympathy and attachment in some quarter; and seldom indeed do we find it. It is too great a treasure to be ever wantonly thrown away when once secured."

Miss Brontë had not been many weeks in her new situation before she had a proof of the kind-hearted hospitality of her employers. Mr.—wrote to her father and urgently invited him to come and make acquaintance with his daughter's new home, by spending a week with her in it; and Mrs.—expressed great regret when one of Miss Brontë's friends drove up to the house to leave a letter or parcel, without entering. So she found that all her friends might freely visit her, and that her father would be received with especial gladness. She thankfully acknowledged this kindness in writing to urge her friend afresh to come and see her; which she accordingly did.

"June, 1841.

"You can hardly fancy it possible, I dare say, that I cannot find a quarter of an hour to scribble a note in; but so it is; and when a note is written, it has to be carried a mile to the post, and that consumes nearly an hour, which is a large portion of the day. Mr. and Mrs.—have been gone a week. I heard from them this morning. No time is fixed for their return, but I hope it will not be delayed long, or I shall miss the chance of seeing Anne this vacation. She came home, I understand, last Wednesday, and is only to be allowed three weeks' vacation, because the family she is with are going to Scarborough. I should like to see her, to judge for myself of the state of her health. I dare not trust any other person's report, no one seems minute enough in their observations. I should very much have liked you to have seen her. I have got on very well with the servants and children so far; yet it is dreary, solitary work. You can tell as well as me the lonely feeling of being without a companion."

Soon after this was written, Mr. and Mrs.—returned, in time to allow Charlotte to go and look after Anne's health, which, as she found to her intense anxiety, was far from strong. What could she do, to nurse and cherish up this little sister, the youngest of them all? Apprehension about her brought up once more the idea of keeping a school. If, by this means, they three could live together, and maintain themselves, all might go well. They would have some time of their own, in which to try again and yet again at that literary career, which, in spite of all baffling difficulties, was never quite set aside as an ultimate object; but far the strongest motive with Charlotte was the conviction that Anne's health was so delicate that it required a degree of tending which none but her sister could give. Thus she wrote during those midsummer holidays.

"Haworth, July 19th, 1841.

"We waited long and anxiously for you, on the Thursday that you promised to come. I quite wearied my eyes with watching from the window, eye-glass in hand, and sometimes spectacles on nose. However, you are not to blame; ... and as to disappointment, why, all must suffer disappointment at some period or other of their lives. But a hundred things I had to say to you will now be forgotten, and never said. There is a project hatching in this house, which both Emily and I anxiously wished to discuss with you. The project is yet in its infancy, hardly peeping from its shell; and whether it will ever come out a fine full-fledged chicken, or will turn addle, and die before it cheeps, is one of those considerations that are but dimly revealed by the oracles of futurity. Now, don't be nonplussed by all this metaphorical mystery. I talk of a plain and every-day occurrence, though, in Delphic style, I wrap up the information in figures of speech concerning eggs, chickens, etcætera, etcæterorum. To come to the point: papa and aunt talk, by fits and starts, of our—id est, Emily, Anne, and myself—commencing a school! I have often, you know, said how much I wished such a thing; but I never could conceive where the capital was to come from for making such a speculation. I was well aware, indeed, that aunt had money, but I always considered that she was the last person who would offer a loan for the

purpose in question. A loan, however, she has offered, or rather intimates that she perhaps will offer, in case pupils can be secured, an eligible situation obtained, &c. This sounds very fair, but still there are matters to be considered which throw something of a damp upon the scheme. I do not expect that aunt will sink more than 1501. in such a venture; and would it be possible to establish a respectable (not by any means a showy) school, and to commence housekeeping, with a capital of only that amount? Propound the question to your sister, if you think she can answer it; if not, don't say a word on the subject. As to getting into debt, that is a thing we could none of us reconcile our minds to for a moment. We do not care how modest, how humble our commencement be, so it be made on sure grounds, and have a safe foundation. In thinking of all possible and impossible places where we could establish a school, I have thought of Burlington, or rather of the neighbourhood of Burlington. Do you remember whether there was any other school there besides that of Miss—? This is, of course, a perfectly crude and random idea. There are a hundred reasons why it should be an impracticable one. We have no connections, no acquaintances there; it is far from home, &c. Still, I fancy the ground in the East Riding is less fully occupied than in the West. Much inquiry and consideration will be necessary, of course, before any place is decided on; and I fear much time will elapse before any plan is executed..... Write as soon as you can. I shall not leave my present situation till my future prospects assume a more fixed and definite aspect."

A fortnight afterwards, we see that the seed has been sown which was to grow up into a plan materially influencing her future life.

"August 7th, 1841.

"This is Saturday evening; I have put the children to bed; now I am going to sit down and answer your letter. I am again by myself—house—keeper and governess—for Mr. and Mrs.—are staying at—. To speak truth, though I am solitary while they are away, it is still by far the happiest part of my time. The children are under decent control, the servants are very observant and attentive to me, and the occasional absence of the master and mistress

relieves me from the duty of always endeavouring to seem cheerful and conversable. Martha—,[m] it appears, is in the way of enjoying great advantages; so is Mary, for you will be surprised to hear that she is returning immediately to the Continent with her brother; not, however, to stay there, but to take a month's tour and recreation. I have had a long letter from Mary, and a packet containing a present of a very handsome black silk scarf, and a pair of beautiful kid gloves, bought at Brussels. Of course, I was in one sense pleased with the gift—pleased that they should think of me so far off, amidst the excitements of one of the most splendid capitals of Europe; and yet it felt irksome to accept it. I should think Mary and Martha have not more than sufficient pocket-money to supply themselves. I wish they had testified their regard by a less expensive token. Mary's letters spoke of some of the pictures and cathedrals she had seen—pictures the most exquisite, cathedrals the most venerable. I hardly know what swelled to my throat as I read her letter: such a vehement impatience of restraint and steady work; such a strong wish for wings—wings such as wealth can furnish; such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to learn; something internal seemed to expand bodily for a minute. I was tantalised by the consciousness of faculties unexercised,—then all collapsed, and I despaired. My dear, I would hardly make that confession to any one but yourself; and to you, rather in a letter than vivâ voce. These rebellious and absurd emotions were only momentary; I quelled them in five minutes. I hope they will not revive, for they were acutely painful. No further steps have been taken about the project I mentioned to you, nor probably will be for the present; but Emily, and Anne, and I, keep it in view. It is our polar star, and we look to it in all circumstances of despondency. I begin to suspect I am writing in a strain which will make you think I am unhappy. This is far from being the case; on the contrary, I know my place is a favourable one, for a governess. What dismays and haunts me sometimes, is a conviction that I have no natural knack for my vocation. If teaching only were requisite, it would be smooth and easy; but it is the living in other people's houses—the estrangement from one's real character—the adoption of a cold, rigid, apathetic exterior, that is painful.... You will not mention our school project at present. A project not actually commenced is always uncertain. Write to me often, my

dear Nell; you know your letters are valued. Your ‘loving child’ (as you choose to call me so).

“C. B.”

“P. S. I am well in health; don’t fancy I am not; but I have one aching feeling at my heart (I must allude to it, though I had resolved not to). It is about Anne; she has so much to endure: far, far more than I ever had. When my thoughts turn to her, they always see her as a patient, persecuted stranger. I know what concealed susceptibility is in her nature, when her feelings are wounded. I wish I could be with her, to administer a little balm. She is more lonely—less gifted with the power of making friends, even than I am. ‘Drop the subject.’ ”

She could bear much for herself; but she could not patiently bear the sorrows of others, especially of her sisters; and again, of the two sisters, the idea of the little, gentle youngest suffering in lonely patience, was insupportable to her. Something must be done. No matter if the desired end were far away; all time was lost in which she was not making progress, however slow, towards it. To have a school, was to have some portion of daily leisure, uncontrolled but by her own sense of duty; it was for the three sisters, loving each other with so passionate an affection, to be together under one roof, and yet earning their own subsistence; above all, it was to have the power of watching over those two whose life and happiness were ever to Charlotte far more than her own. But no trembling impatience should lead her to take an unwise step in haste. She inquired in every direction she could, as to the chances which a new school might have of success. But in all there seemed more establishments like the one which the sisters wished to set up than could be supported. What was to be done? Superior advantages must be offered. But how? They themselves abounded in thought, power, and information; but these are qualifications scarcely fit to be inserted in a prospectus. Of French they knew something; enough to read it fluently, but hardly enough to teach it in competition with natives, or professional masters. Emily and Anne had some knowledge of music; but

here again it was doubtful whether, without more instruction, they could engage to give lessons in it.

Just about this time, Miss Wooler was thinking of relinquishing her school at Dewsbury Moor; and offered to give it up in favour of her old pupils, the Brontës. A sister of hers had taken the active management since the time when Charlotte was a teacher; but the number of pupils had diminished; and, if the Brontës undertook it, they would have to try and work it up to its former state of prosperity. This, again, would require advantages on their part which they did not at present possess, but which Charlotte caught a glimpse of. She resolved to follow the clue, and never to rest till she had reached a successful issue. With the forced calm of a suppressed eagerness, that sends a glow of desire through every word of the following letter, she wrote to her aunt thus.

"Sept. 29th, 1841.

"DEAR AUNT,

"I have heard nothing of Miss Wooler yet since I wrote to her, intimating that I would accept her offer. I cannot conjecture the reason of this long silence, unless some unforeseen impediment has occurred in concluding the bargain. Meantime, a plan has been suggested and approved by Mr. and Mrs.—" (the father and mother of her pupils), "and others, which I wish now to impart to you. My friends recommend me, if I desire to secure permanent success, to delay commencing the school for six months longer, and by all means to contrive, by hook or by crook, to spend the intervening time in some school on the continent. They say schools in England are so numerous, competition so great, that without some such step towards attaining superiority, we shall probably have a very hard struggle, and may fail in the end. They say, moreover, that the loan of 1001., which you have been so kind as to offer us, will, perhaps, not be all required now, as Miss Wooler will lend us the furniture; and that, if the speculation is intended to be a good and successful one, half the sum, at least, ought to be laid out in the manner I have mentioned, thereby insuring a more speedy repayment both of interest and principal.

“I would not go to France or to Paris. I would go to Brussels, in Belgium. The cost of the journey there, at the dearest rate of travelling, would be 51.; living is there little more than half as dear as it is in England, and the facilities for education are equal or superior to any other place in Europe. In half a year, I could acquire a thorough familiarity with French. I could improve greatly in Italian, and even get a dash of German; i. e., providing my health continued as good as it is now. Mary is now staying at Brussels, at a first rate establishment there. I should not think of going to the Château de Kokleberg,[n] where she is resident, as the terms are much too high; but if I wrote to her, she, with the assistance of Mrs. Jenkins, the wife of the British Chaplain, would be able to secure me a cheap decent residence and respectable protection. I should have the opportunity of seeing her frequently; she would make me acquainted with the city; and, with the assistance of her cousins, I should probably be introduced to connections far more improving, polished, and cultivated, than I have yet known.

“These are advantages which would turn to real account, when we actually commenced a school; and, if Emily could share them with me, we could take a footing in the world afterwards which we can never do now. I say Emily instead of Anne; for Anne might take her turn at some future period, if our school answered. I feel certain, while I am writing, that you will see the propriety of what I say. You always like to use your money to the best advantage. You are not fond of making shabby purchases; when you do confer a favour, it is often done in style; and, depend upon it, 501., or 1001., thus laid out, would be well employed. Of course, I know no other friend in the world to whom I could apply, on this subject, except yourself. I feel an absolute conviction that, if this advantage were allowed us, it would be the making of us for life. Papa will, perhaps, think it a wild and ambitious scheme; but who ever rose in the world without ambition? When he left Ireland to go to Cambridge University, he was as ambitious as I am now. I want us all to get on. I know we have talents, and I want them to be turned to account. I look to you, aunt, to help us. I think you will not refuse. I know, if you consent, it shall not be my fault if you ever repent your kindness.”

This letter was written from the house in which she was residing as governess. It was some little time before an answer came. Much had to be talked over between the father and aunt in Haworth Parsonage. At last consent was given. Then, and not till then, she confided her plan to an intimate friend. She was not one to talk over-much about any project, while it remained uncertain—to speak about her labour, in any direction, while its result was doubtful.

"Nov. 2, 1841.

"Now let us begin to quarrel. In the first place I must consider whether I will commence operations on the defensive, or the offensive. The defensive, I think. You say, and I see plainly, that your feelings have been hurt by an apparent want of confidence on my part. You heard from others of Miss Wooler's overtures before I communicated them to you myself. This is true. I was deliberating on plans important to my future prospects. I never exchanged a letter with you on the subject. True again. This appears strange conduct to a friend, near and dear, long known, and never found wanting. Most true. I cannot give you my excuses for this behaviour; this word excuse implies confession of a fault, and I do not feel that I have been in fault. The plain fact is, I was not, I am not now, certain of my destiny. On the contrary, I have been most uncertain, perplexed with contradictory schemes and proposals. My time, as I have often told you, is fully occupied; yet I had many letters to write, which it was absolutely necessary should be written. I knew it would avail nothing to write to you then to say I was in doubt and uncertainty—hoping this, fearing that, anxious, eagerly desirous to do what seemed impossible to be done. When I thought of you in that busy interval, it was to resolve, that you should know all when my way was clear, and my grand end attained. If I could, I would always work in silence and obscurity, and let my efforts be known by their results. Miss W. did most kindly propose that I should come to Dewsbury Moor, and attempt to revive the school her sister had relinquished. She offered me the use of her furniture, for the consideration of her board. At first, I received the proposal cordially, and prepared to do my utmost to bring about success; but a fire

was kindled in my very heart, which I could not quench. I so longed to increase my attainments—to become something better than I am; a glimpse of what I felt, I showed to you in one of my former letters—only a glimpse; Mary cast oil upon the flames—encouraged me, and in her own strong, energetic language, heartened me on. I longed to go to Brussels; but how could I get? I wished for one, at least, of my sisters to share the advantage with me. I fixed on Emily. She deserved the reward, I knew. How could the point be managed? In extreme excitement, I wrote a letter home, which carried the day. I made an appeal to aunt for assistance, which was answered by consent. Things are not settled; yet it is sufficient to say we have a chance of going for half a year. Dewsbury Moor is relinquished. Perhaps, fortunately so, for it is an obscure, dreary place, not adapted for a school. In my secret soul, I believe there is no cause to regret it. My plans for the future are bounded to this intention: if I once get to Brussels, and if my health is spared, I will do my best to make the utmost of every advantage that shall come within my reach. When the half-year is expired, I will do what I can.

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“Believe me, though I was born in April, the month of cloud and sunshine, I am not changeful. My spirits are unequal, and sometimes I speak vehemently, and sometimes I say nothing at all; but I have a steady regard for you, and if you will let the cloud and shower pass by, be sure the sun is always behind, obscured, but still existing.”

At Christmas she left her situation, after a parting with her employers, which seems to have affected and touched her greatly. “They only made too much of me,” was her remark, after leaving this family; “I did not deserve it.”

All four children hoped to meet together at their father’s house this December. Branwell expected to have a short leave of absence from his employment as a clerk on the Leeds and Manchester Railway, in which he

had been engaged for five months. Anne arrived before Christmas-day. She had rendered herself so valuable in her difficult situation, that her employers vehemently urged her return, although she had announced her resolution to leave them; partly on account of the harsh treatment she had received, and partly because her stay at home, during her sisters' absence in Belgium, seemed desirable, when the age of the three remaining inhabitants of the parsonage was taken into consideration.

After some correspondence and much talking over plans at home, it seemed better, in consequence of letters which they received from Brussels giving a discouraging account of the schools there, that Charlotte and Emily should go to an institution at Lille, in the north of France, which was highly recommended by Baptist Noel, and other clergymen. Indeed, at the end of January, it was arranged that they were to set off for this place in three weeks, under the escort of a French lady, then visiting in London. The terms were £50 each pupil, for board and French alone, but a separate room was to be allowed for this sum; without this indulgence, it was lower. Charlotte writes:—

"January 20th, 1842.

"I considered it kind in aunt to consent to an extra sum for a separate room. We shall find it a great privilege in many ways. I regret the change from Brussels to Lille on many accounts, chiefly that I shall not see Martha. Mary has been indefatigably kind in providing me with information. She has grudged no labour, and scarcely any expense to that end. Mary's price is above rubies. I have, in fact, two friends—you and her—staunch and true, in whose faith and sincerity I have as strong a belief as I have in the Bible. I have bothered you both—you especially; but you always get the tongs and heap coals of fire upon my head. I have had letters to write lately to Brussels, to Lille, and to London. I have lots of chemises, night-gowns, pocket-handkerchiefs, and pockets to make; besides clothes to repair. I have been, every week since I came home, expecting to see Branwell, and he has never been able to get over yet. We fully expect him, however, next Saturday. Under these circumstances how can I go visiting? You tantalize me to death with talking of conversations by the fireside. Depend upon it,

we are not to have any such for many a long month to come. I get an interesting impression of old age upon my face; and when you see me next I shall certainly wear caps and spectacles.”

CHAPTER XI.

I am not aware of all the circumstances which led to the relinquishment of the Lille plan. Brussels had had from the first a strong attraction for Charlotte; and the idea of going there, in preference to any other place, had only been given up in consequence of the information received of the second-rate character of its schools. Reference has been made in her letters to Mrs. Jenkins, the wife of the chaplain of the British Embassy. At the request of his brother—a clergyman, living not many miles from Haworth, and an acquaintance of Mr. Brontë's—she made much inquiry, and at length, after some discouragement in her search, heard of a school which seemed in every respect desirable. There was an English lady, who had long lived in the Orleans family, amidst the various fluctuations of their fortunes, and who, when the Princess Louise was married to King Leopold, accompanied her to Brussels, in the capacity of reader. This lady's grand-daughter was receiving her education at the pensionnat of Madame Héger;[1] and so satisfied was the grandmother with the kind of instruction given, that she named the establishment, with high encomiums, to Mrs. Jenkins; and, in consequence, it was decided that, if the terms suited, Miss Brontë and Emily should proceed thither. M. Héger informs me that, on receipt of a letter from Charlotte, making very particular inquiries as to the possible amount of what are usually termed "extras," he and his wife were so much struck by the simple earnest tone of the letter, that they said to each other:—"These are the daughters of an English pastor, of moderate means, anxious to learn with an ulterior view of instructing others, and to whom the risk of additional expense is of great consequence. Let us name a specific sum, within which all expenses shall be included."

This was accordingly done; the agreement was concluded, and the Brontës prepared to leave their native country for the first time, if we except the melancholy and memorable residence at Cowan's Bridge. Mr. Brontë determined to accompany his daughters. Mary and her brother, who were experienced in foreign travelling, were also of the party. Charlotte first saw London in the day or two they now stopped there; and, from an expression

in one of her subsequent letters, they all, I believe, stayed at the Chapter Coffee House, Paternoster Row—a strange, old-fashioned tavern, of which I shall have more to say hereafter.

Mr. Brontë took his daughters to the Rue d'Isabelle, Brussels; remained one night at Mr. Jenkins'; and straight returned to his wild Yorkshire village.[2]

What a contrast to that must the Belgian capital have presented to those two young women thus left behind! Suffering acutely from every strange and unaccustomed contact—far away from their beloved home, and the dear moors beyond—their indomitable will was their great support. Charlotte's own words, with regard to Emily, are:—

"After the age of twenty, having meantime studied alone with diligence and perseverance, she went with me to an establishment on the continent. The same suffering and conflict ensued, heightened by the strong recoil of her upright heretic and English spirit from the gentle Jesuitry of the foreign and Romish system. Once more she seemed sinking, but this time she rallied through the mere force of resolution: with inward remorse and shame she looked back on her former failure, and resolved to conquer, but the victory cost her dear. She was never happy till she carried her hard-won knowledge back to the remote English village, the old parsonage-house, and desolate Yorkshire hills."

They wanted learning. They came for learning. They would learn. Where they had a distinct purpose to be achieved in intercourse with their fellows, they forgot themselves; at all other times they were miserably shy. Mrs. Jenkins told me that she used to ask them to spend Sundays and holidays with her, until she found that they felt more pain than pleasure from such visits. Emily hardly ever uttered more than a monosyllable. Charlotte was sometimes excited sufficiently to speak eloquently and well—on certain subjects; but before her tongue was thus loosened, she had a habit of gradually wheeling round on her chair, so as almost to conceal her face from the person to whom she was speaking.

And yet there was much in Brussels to strike a responsive chord in her powerful imagination. At length she was seeing somewhat of that grand old world of which she had dreamed. As the gay crowds passed by her, so had gay crowds paced those streets for centuries, in all their varying costumes. Every spot told an historic tale, extending back into the fabulous ages when San and Jannika, the aboriginal giant and giantess, looked over the wall, forty feet high, of what is now the Rue Villa Hermosa, and peered down upon the new settlers who were to turn them out of the country in which they had lived since the deluge. The great solemn Cathedral of St. Gudule, the religious paintings, the striking forms and ceremonies of the Romish Church—all made a deep impression on the girls, fresh from the bare walls and simple worship of Haworth Church. And then they were indignant with themselves for having been susceptible of this impression, and their stout Protestant hearts arrayed themselves against the false Duessa that had thus imposed upon them.

The very building they occupied as pupils, in Madame Heger's pensionnat, had its own ghostly train of splendid associations, marching for ever, in shadowy procession, through and through the ancient rooms, and shaded alleys of the gardens. From the splendour of today in the Rue Royale, if you turn aside, near the statue of the General Beliard, you look down four flights of broad stone steps upon the Rue d'Isabelle. The chimneys of the houses in it are below your feet. Opposite to the lowest flight of steps, there is a large old mansion facing you, with a spacious walled garden behind—and to the right of it. In front of this garden, on the same side as the mansion, and with great boughs of trees sweeping over their lowly roofs, is a row of small, picturesque, old-fashioned cottages, not unlike, in degree and uniformity, to the almshouses so often seen in an English country town. The Rue d'Isabelle looks as though it had been untouched by the innovations of the builder for the last three centuries; and yet any one might drop a stone into it from the back windows of the grand modern hotels in the Rue Royale, built and furnished in the newest Parisian fashion.

In the thirteenth century, the Rue d'Isabelle was called the Fossé-aux-Chiens; and the kennels for the ducal hounds occupied the place where Madame Héger's pensionnat now stands. A hospital (in the ancient large

meaning of the word) succeeded to the kennel. The houseless and the poor, perhaps the leprous, were received by the brethren of a religious order, in a building on this sheltered site; and what had been a fosse for defence, was filled up with herb-gardens and orchards for upwards of a hundred years. Then came the aristocratic guild of the cross-bow men—that company the members whereof were required to prove their noble descent untainted for so many generations, before they could be admitted into the guild; and, being admitted, were required to swear a solemn oath, that no other pastime or exercise should take up any part of their leisure, the whole of which was to be devoted to the practice of the noble art of shooting with the cross-bow. Once a year a grand match was held, under the patronage of some saint, to whose church-steeple was affixed the bird, or semblance of a bird, to be hit by the victor.[o] The conqueror in the game was Roi des Arbalétriers for the coming year, and received a jewelled decoration accordingly, which he was entitled to wear for twelve months; after which he restored it to the guild, to be again striven for. The family of him who died during the year that he was king, were bound to present the decoration to the church of the patron saint of the guild, and to furnish a similar prize to be contended for afresh. These noble cross-bow men of the middle ages formed a sort of armed guard to the powers in existence, and almost invariably took the aristocratic, in preference to the democratic side, in the numerous civil dissensions in the Flemish towns. Hence they were protected by the authorities, and easily obtained favorable and sheltered sites for their exercise ground. And thus they came to occupy the old fosse, and took possession of the great orchard of the hospital, lying tranquil and sunny in the hollow below the rampart.

But, in the sixteenth century, it became necessary to construct a street through the exercise-ground of the “Arbalétriers du Grand Serment,” and, after much delay, the company were induced by the beloved Infanta Isabella to give up the requisite plot of ground. In recompense for this, Isabella—who herself was a member of the guild, and had even shot down the bird, and been Queen in 1615—made many presents to the arbalétriers; and, in return, the grateful city, which had long wanted a nearer road to St. Gudule, but been baffled by the noble archers, called the street after her name. She, as a sort of indemnification to the arbalétriers, caused a “great mansion” to be built for their accommodation in the new Rue d’Isabelle. This mansion

was placed in front of their exercise-ground, and was of a square shape. On a remote part of the walls, may still be read—

PHILLIPPO IIII. HISPAN. REGE. ISABELLA-CLARA-EUGENIA HISPAN. INFANS. MAGNÆ GULDÆ REGINA GULDÆ FRATRIBUS POSUIT.

In that mansion was held all the splendid feasts of the Grand Serment des Arbalétriers. The master-archer lived there constantly, in order to be ever at hand to render his services to the guild. The great saloon was also used for the court balls and festivals, when the archers were not admitted. The Infanta caused other and smaller houses to be built in her new street, to serve as residences for her “garde noble;” and for her “garde bourgeoise,” a small habitation each, some of which still remain, to remind us of English almshouses. The “great mansion,” with its quadrangular form; the spacious saloon—once used for the arch-ducal balls, where the dark grave Spaniards mixed with the blond nobility of Brabant and Flanders—now a school-room for Belgian girls; the cross-bow men’s archery-ground—all are there—the pensionnat of Madame Héger.

This lady was assisted in the work of instruction by her husband—a kindly, wise, good, and religious man—whose acquaintance I am glad to have made,[3] and who has furnished me with some interesting details, from his wife’s recollections and his own, of the two Miss Brontës during their residence in Brussels. He had the better opportunities of watching them, from his giving lessons in the French language and literature in the school. A short extract from a letter, written to me by a French lady resident in Brussels, and well qualified to judge, will help to show the estimation in which he is held.

“Je ne connais pas personellement M. Héger, mais je sais qu‘il est peu de caractères aussi nobles, aussi admirables que le sien. Il est un des membres les plus zélés de cette Société de S. Vincent de Paul dont je t’ai dejà parlé, et ne se contente pas de servir les pauvres et les malades, mais leur consacre encore les soirees. Après des journées absorbées tout entières par les devoirs que sa place lui impose, il réunit les pauvres, les ouvriers, leur donne des cours gratuits, et trouve encore le moyen de les amuser en les

instruisant. Ce dévouement te dira assez que M. Héger est profondement et ouvertement religieux. Il a des manières franches et avenantes; il se fait aimer de tous ceux qui l‘approchent, et surtout des enfants. Il a le parole facile, et possède à un haut degré l’ éloquence du bon sens et du cœur. Il n’est point auteur. Homme de zèle et de conscience, il vient de se démettre des fonctions élevées et lucratives qu‘il exercait a l’ Athenée, celles de Préfet des Etudes, parcequ’il ne peut y réaliser le bien qui‘1 avait esperé, introduire l’ enseignement religieux dans le programme des études. J’ai vu une fois Madame Heger, qui a quelque chose de froid et de compassé dans son maintien, et qui prévient peu en sa faveur. Je la crois pourtant aimée et appreciée par ses élèves.”[4]

There were from eighty to a hundred pupils in the pensionnat, when Charlotte and Emily Brontë entered in February 1842.

M. Héger’s account is that they knew nothing of French. I suspect they knew as much (or as little) for all conversational purposes, as any English girls do, who have never been abroad, and have only learnt the idioms and pronunciation from an Englishwoman. The two sisters clung together, and kept apart from the herd of happy, boisterous, well-befriended Belgian girls, who, in their turn, thought the new English pupils wild and scared-looking, with strange, odd, insular ideas about dress; for Emily had taken a fancy to the fashion, ugly and preposterous even during its reign, of gigot sleeves, and persisted in wearing them long after they were “gone out.” Her petticoats, too, had not a curve or a wave in them, but hung down straight and long, clinging to her lank figure. The sisters spoke to no one but from necessity They were too full of earnest thought, and of the exile’s sick yearning, to be ready for careless conversation, or merry game. M. Héger, who had done little but observe, during the few first weeks of their residence in the Rue d’Isabelle, perceived that with their unusual characters, and extraordinary talents, a different mode must be adopted from that in which he generally taught French to English girls. He seems to have rated Emily’s genius as something even higher than Charlotte’s; and her estimation of their relative powers was the same. Emily had a head for logic, and a capability of argument, unusual in a man, and rare indeed in a woman, according to M. Heger. Impairing the force of this gift, was her stubborn tenacity of will, which rendered her obtuse to all reasoning where

her own wishes, or her own sense of right, was concerned. “She should have been a man—a great navigator,” said M. Héger in speaking of her. “Her powerful reason would have deduced new spheres of discovery from the knowledge of the old; and her strong, imperious will would never have been daunted by opposition or difficulty; never have given way but with life.” And yet, moreover, her faculty of imagination was such that, if she had written a history, her view of scenes and characters would have been so vivid, and so powerfully expressed, and supported by such a show of argument, that it would have dominated over the reader, whatever might have been his previous opinions, or his cooler perceptions of its truth. But she appeared egotistical and exacting compared to Charlotte, who was always unselfish (this is M. Héger’s testimony); and in the anxiety of the elder to make her younger sister contented, she allowed her to exercise a kind of unconscious tyranny over her.

After consulting with his wife, M. Héger told them that he meant to dispense with the old method of grounding in grammar, vocabulary, &c., and to proceed on a new plan—something similar to what he had occasionally adopted with the elder among his French and Belgian pupils. He proposed to read to them some of the master-pieces of the most celebrated French authors (such as Casimir de la Vigne’s poem on the “Death of Joan of Arc,” parts of Bossuet, the admirable translation of the noble letter of St. Ignatius to the Roman Christians in the “Bibliotheque Choisie des Pères de l’ Eglise, &c.), and after having thus impressed the complete effect of the whole, to analyze the parts with them, pointing out in what such or such an author excelled, and where were the blemishes. He believed that he had to do with pupils capable, from their ready sympathy with the intellectual, the refined, the polished, or the noble, of catching the echo of a style, and so reproducing their own thoughts in a somewhat similar manner.

After explaining his plan to them, he awaited their reply. Emily spoke first; and said that she saw no good to be derived from it; and that, by adopting it, they should lose all originality of thought and expression. She would have entered into an argument on the subject, but for this, M. Heger had no time. Charlotte then spoke; she also doubted the success of the plan; but she would follow out M. Héger’s advice, because she was bound to

obey him while she was his pupil. Before speaking of the results, it may be desirable to give an extract from one of her letters, which shows some of her first impressions of her new life.

"Brussels, 1842 (May ?)

"I was twenty-six years old a week or two since; and at this ripe time of life I am a school-girl, and, on the whole, very happy in that capacity. It felt very strange at first to submit to authority instead of exercising it—to obey orders instead of giving them; but I like that state of things. I returned to it with the same avidity that a cow, that has long been kept on dry hay, returns to fresh grass. Don't laugh at my simile. It is natural to me to submit, and very unnatural to command.

"This is a large school, in which there are about forty externes, or day-pupils, and twelve pensionnaires, or boarders. Madame Héger, the head, is a lady of precisely the same cast of mind, degree of cultivation, and quality of intellect as Miss—.[p] I think the severe points are a little softened, because she has not been disappointed, and consequently soured. In a word, she is a married instead of a maiden lady. There are three teachers in the school—Mademoiselle Blanche, Mademoiselle Sophie, and Mademoiselle Marie. The two first have no particular character. One is an old maid, and the other will be one. Mademoiselle Marie is talented and original, but of repulsive and arbitrary manners, which have made the whole school, except myself and Emily, her bitter enemies. No less than seven masters attend, to teach the different branches of education—French, Drawing, Music, Singing, Writing, Arithmetic, and German. All in the house are Catholics except ourselves, one other girl, and the gouvernante of Madame's children, an Englishwoman, in rank something between a lady's-maid and a nursery governess. The difference in country and religion makes a broad line of demarcation between us and all the rest. We are completely isolated in the midst of numbers. Yet I think I am never unhappy; my present life is so delightful, so congenial to my own nature, compared to that of a governess. My time, constantly occupied, passes too rapidly. Hitherto both Emily and I have had good health, and therefore we have been able to work well. There is one individual of whom I have not yet spoken—M. Héger, the husband of

Madame. He is professor of rhetoric, a man of power as to mind, but very choleric and irritable in temperament. He is very angry with me just at present, because I have written a translation which he chose to stigmatize as ‘*peu correct*.’ He did not tell me so, but wrote the word on the margin of my book, and asked, in brief stern phrase, how it happened that my compositions were always better than my translations? adding that the thing seemed to him inexplicable. The fact is, some weeks ago, in a high-flown humour, he forbade me to use either dictionary or grammar in translating the most difficult English compositions into French. This makes the task rather arduous, and compels me every now and then to introduce an English word, which nearly plucks the eyes out of his head when he sees it. Emily and he don’t draw well together at all. Emily works like a horse, and she has had great difficulties to contend with—far greater than I have had. Indeed, those who come to a French school for instruction ought previously to have acquired a considerable knowledge of the French language, otherwise they will lose a great deal of time, for the course of instruction is adapted to natives and not to foreigners; and in these large establishments they will not change their ordinary course for one or two strangers. The few private lessons that M. Héger has vouchsafed to give us, are, I suppose, to be considered a great favour; and I can perceive they have already excited much spite and jealousy in the school.

“You will abuse this letter for being short and dreary, and there are a hundred things which I want to tell you, but I have not time. Brussels is a beautiful city. The Belgians hate the English. Their external morality is more rigid than ours. To lace the stays without a handkerchief on the neck is considered a disgusting piece of indelicacy.”

The passage in this letter where M. Héger is represented as prohibiting the use of dictionary or grammar, refers, I imagine, to the time I have mentioned, when he determined to adopt a new method of instruction in the French language, of which they were to catch the spirit and rhythm rather from the ear and the heart, as its noblest accents fell upon them, than by over-careful and anxious study of its grammatical rules. It seems to me a daring experiment on the part of their teacher; but, doubtless, he knew his

ground; and that it answered is evident in the composition of some of Charlotte's "dévoirs,"[q] written about this time. I am tempted, in illustration of this season of mental culture, to recur to a conversation which I had with M. Héger on the manner in which he formed his pupils' style, and to give a proof of his success, by copying a "dévoir" of Charlotte's, with his remarks upon it.

He told me that one day this summer (when the Brontës had been for about four months receiving instruction from him) he read to them Victor Hugo's celebrated portrait of Mirabeau, "mais, dans ma leçon je me bornais à ce qui concerne Mirabeau Orateur.[5] C'est après l'analyse de ce morçeau, considéré surtout du point de vue du fond, de la disposition, de ce qu'on pourrait appeler la charpente qu'ont été faits les deux portraits que je vous donne." He went on to say that he had pointed out to them the fault in Victor Hugo's style as being exaggeration in conception, and, at the same time, he had made them notice the extreme beauty of his "nuances" of expression. They were then dismissed to choose the subject of a similar kind of portrait. This selection M. Héger always left to them; for "it is necessary," he observed, "before sitting down to write on a subject, to have thoughts and feelings about it. I cannot tell on what subject your heart and mind have been excited. I must leave that to you." The marginal comments, I need hardly say, are M. Heger's; the words in italics are Charlotte's, for which he substitutes a better form of expression, which is placed between brackets.

Imitation.

"Le 31 Juillet, 1842.

Portrait de Pierre L'Hermite.[r]

Charlotte Brontë.

"De temps en temps, il parait sur la terre des hommes destines à etre les instruments [prédestinés] de grands changements, moreaux ou politiques. Quelquefois c'est un conquérant, un Alexandre ou un Attila, qui passe

comme un ouragan, et purifie l'atmosphere moral, comme 1'orage purifie l'atmosphère physique; quelquefois, c'est un révolutionnaire, un Cromwell, ou un Robespierre, qui fait expier par un roi les vices de toute une dynastie; quelquefois c'est un enthousiaste réligieux comme Mahométe, ou Pierre l'Ermite, qui, avec le seul levier de la pensée soulève des nations entières, les déracine et les transplante dans des climats nouveaux, *peuplant* l'Asie avec *les habitants de I'Europe.* Pierre l'Ermite était gentilhomme de Picardie, en France. pourquoi donc n'a-t-il passé sa vie comme les autres gentilhommes ses contemporains ont passé la leur, à table, à la chasse, dans son lit, sans s'inquiéter de Saladin, ou de ses Sarrasins? N'est-ce pas, parcequ'ilya dans certaines natures, une ardeur [un foyer d'activité] indomptable qui ne leur permet pas de rester inactives, qui les force à se remuer afin d'exercer les facultes puissantes, qui même en dormant sont prêtes comme Sampson à briser les nœuds qui *les retiennent?*

Pourquoi cette suppression?

les fautes et

Ce detail ne convient qu'à Pierre. Inutile, quand vous écrivez en Français.

Vous avez commencé à parler de Pierre: vous êtes entrée dans le sujet:marchez au but.

"Pierre prit la profession des armes; *si son* ardeur avait été de cette espèce [si il n'avait eu que cette ardeur vulgaire] qui provient d'une robuste santé il aurait [c'eut] été un brave militaire, et rien de plus; mais son ardeur était celle de l'âme, sa flamme était pure et elle s'elevait vers le ciel.

"Sans doute [II est vrai que] la jeunesse de Pierre, était [fut] troublée par passions orageuses; les natures puissantes sont extrèmes en tout, elles ne connaissent la tiédeur ni dans le bien, ni dans le mal; Pierre donc chercha d'abord avidément la gloire què se flétrit, et les plaisirs qui trompent, mais *il fit* bientôt la découverte [bientot il s'aperçut] que ce qu'il poursuivait n'était qu' une illusion <u>à laquelle il ne pourrait jamais atteindre:</u> il retourna donc sur ses pas, il recommença le voyage de la vie, mais cette fois il évita

le chemin spacieux qui méne à la perdition et il prit le chemin étroit qui méne à la vie; puisque [comme] le trajet était long et difficile il jeta la casque et les armes du soldat, et se vêtit de l'habit simple du moine. A la vie militaire succéda la vie monastique, car, les extremes se touchent et *chez* l'homme *sincere* la sincerité du repentir amène [necessairement à la suite] avec lui la rigueur de la penitence. [Voila donc Pierre devena moine!]

Inutile, quard vous avez dit illusion

"Mais Pierre [il] avait en lui un principe qui l'empechait de rester long-temps inactif, ses idées, sur quel sujet qu'il soit [que ce fut] ne pouvaient pas être bornées; il ne lui suffisait pas que lui-même fût religieux, que lui-même fût convaincee de la réalité de Christianismé (sic) il fallait que toute l'Europe que toute l'Asie partagea sa conviction et professât la croyance de la Croix. La Piété [fervente] élevée par le Genie, nourrie par la Solitude fit naitre *une* éspèce d'inspiration [exalta son âme jusqu'a l'inspiration] dans *son* ame, et lorsqu'il quitta sa cellule et reparut dans le monde, il portait comme Moise l'empreinte de la Divinité sur son front, et tout [tous] réconnurent en lui la veritable apôtre de la Croix.

"Mahomet n'avait jamais rémué les molles nations de l'Orient comme alors Pièrre remua les peuples austéres de l'Occident; il fallait que cette eloquence fût d'une force presque miraculeuse *qui pouvait* [presqu'elle] persuader [ait] aux rois de vendre leurs royaumes afin de *procurer* [pour avoir] des armes et des soldats *pour* aider [à offrir] à Pierre dans la guerre sainte qu'il voulait livrer aux infidéles. La puissance de Pierre [l'ErmiteJ n'était nullement une puissance physique, car la nature, ou pour mieux dire, Dieu est impartial dans la distribution de ses dons; il accorde à l'un de ses enfants la grace, la beauté, les perfections corporelles, à l'autre l'esprit, la grandeur morale. Pierre donc était un homme, petit d'une physionomie peu agréable; mais il avait ce courage, cette constance, cet enthousiasme, cette energie de sentiment qui écrase toute opposition, et qui fait que la volonté d'un, seul homme devient la loi de toute une nation. Pour se former une juste idée de l'influence qu'exerça cet homme sur les caractères [choses] et les idées de son temps il faut se le representer au milieu de l'armee des croisées, dans son double role de prophète et de guerrier; le pauvre hermite vêtu du pauvre [de l'humble] habit gris est la plus puissant qu'un roi: il est entouré d'une [de la] multitude [abide] une multitude qui ne voit que lui,

tandis que lui, il ne voit que le ciel; ses yeux lévés semblent dire, ‘je vois Dieu et les anges. et j’ai perdu de vue la terre!’

“Dans *ce moment le* [mais ce] pauvre habit [froc] gris est pour lui comme le manteau d‘Elijah; il l’enveloppe d’inspiration; il [Pierre] lit dans l’avenir; il voit Jerusalem delivrée; [il voit] le saint sepulchre libre; il voit le croissant argent est arraché du Temple, et l‘Oriflamme et la Croix rouge sont établi à sa place; non seulement Pierre voit ces merveilles, mais il les fait voir à tous ceux qui l’entourent, il ravive l’esperance, et le courage dans [tous ces corps epuisés de fatigues et de privations] La bataille ne sera livrée que demain, mais la victoire est décidée ce soir. Pierre a promis; et les Croisées se fient à sa parole, comme les Israelites se fiaient à celle de Moise et de Josué.”[6]

As a companion portrait to this, Emily chose to depict Harold on the eve of the battle of Hastings. It appears to me, that her dévoir is superior to Charlotte’s in power and in imagination, and fully equal to it in language; and that this, in both cases, considering how little practical knowledge of French they had when they arrived at Brussels in February, and that they wrote without the aid of dictionary or grammar, is unusual and remarkable. We shall see the progress Charlotte had made, in ease and grace of style, a year later.

In the choice of subjects left to her selection, she frequently took characters and scenes from the Old Testament, with which all her writings show that she was especially familiar. The picturesqueness and colour (if I may so express it), the grandeur and breadth of its narrations, impressed her deeply. To use M. Heger’s expression, “Elle était nourrie de la Bible.”[s] After he had read De la Vigne’s poem on Joan of Arc, she chose the “Vision and Death of Moses on Mount Nebo” to write about; and, in looking over this dévoir, I was much struck with one or two of M. Héger’s remarks. After describing, in a quiet and simple manner, the circumstances under which Moses took leave of the Israelites, her imagination becomes warmed, and she launches out into a noble strain, depicting the glorious futurity of the Chosen People, as looking down upon the Promised Land, he sees their prosperity in prophetic vision. But, before reaching the middle of this

glowing description, she interrupts herself to discuss for a moment the doubts that have been thrown on the miraculous relations of the Old Testament. M. Héger remarks, “When you are writing, place your argument first in cool, prosaic language; but when you have thrown the reins on the neck of your imagination, do not pull her up to reason.” Again in the vision of Moses, he sees the maidens leading forth their flocks to the wells at eventide, and they are described as wearing flowery garlands. Here the writer is reminded of the necessity of preserving a certain verisimilitude: Moses might from his elevation see mountains and plains, groups of maidens and herds of cattle, but could hardly perceive the details of dress, or the ornaments of the head.

When they had made further progress, M. Héger took up a more advanced plan, that of synthetical teaching.[7] He would read to them various accounts of the same person or event, and make them notice the points of agreement and disagreement. Where they were different, he would make them seek the origin of that difference by causing them to examine well into the character and position of each separate writer, and how they would be likely to affect his conception of truth. For instance, take Cromwell. He would read Bossuet’s description of him in the “Oraison Funèbre de la Reine d’Angleterre,” and show how in this he was considered entirely from the religious point of view, as an instrument in the hands of God, pre-ordained to His work. Then he would make them read Guizot, and see how, in his view, Cromwell was endowed with the utmost power of free will, but governed by no higher motive than that of expediency; while Carlyle regarded him as a character regulated by a strong and conscientious desire to do the will of the Lord.[8] Then he would desire them to remember that the Royalist and Commonwealth man had each their different opinions of the great Protector. And from these conflicting characters he would require them to sift and collect the elements of truth, and try to unite them into a perfect whole.

This kind of exercise delighted Charlotte. It called into play her powers of analysis, which were extraordinary, and she very soon excelled in it.

Whatever the Brontës could be national they were so, with the same tenacity of attachment which made them suffer as they did whenever they

left Haworth. They were Protestant to the backbone in other things besides their religion, but pre-eminently so in that. Touched as Charlotte was by the letter of St. Ignatius before alluded to, she claimed equal self-devotion, and from as high a motive, for some of the missionaries of the English Church sent out to toil and to perish on the poisonous African coast, and wrote as an "imitation," "Lettre d'un Missionaire, Sierra Leone, Afrique."

Something of her feeling, too, appears in the following letter:—

"*Brussels,* 1842.

"I consider it doubtful whether I shall come home in September or not. Madame Heger has made a proposal for both me and Emily to stay another half year, offering to dismiss her English master, and take me as English teacher; also to employ Emily some part of each day in teaching music to a certain number of the pupils. For these services we are to be allowed to continue our studies in French and German, and to have board, &c., without paying for it; no salaries, however, are offered. The proposal is kind, and in a great selfish city like Brussels, and a great selfish school, containing nearly ninety pupils (boarders and day-pupils included), implies a degree of interest which demands gratitude in return. I am inclined to accept it. What think you? I don't deny I sometimes wish to be in England, or that I have brief attacks of home sickness; but on the whole, I have borne a very valiant heart so far; and I have been happy in Brussels, because I have always been fully occupied with the employments that I like. Emily is making rapid progress in French, German, music, and drawing. Monsieur and Madame Héger begin to recognise the valuable parts of her character, under her singularities. If the national character of the Belgians is to be measured by the character of most of the girls in this school, it is a character singularly cold, selfish, animal, and inferior. They are very mutinous and difficult for the teachers to manage; and their principles are rotten to the core. We avoid them, which it is not difficult to do, as we have the brand of Protestantism and Anglicism upon us. People talk of the danger which Protestants expose themselves to, in going to reside in Catholic countries, and thereby running the chance of changing their faith. My advice to all Protestants who are tempted to do anything so besotted as turn Catholics is, to walk over the sea

on to the Continent; to attend mass sedulously for a time; to note well the mummeries thereof; also the idiotic, mercenary aspect of all the priests; and then, if they are still disposed to consider Papistry in any other light than a most feeble, childish piece of humbug, let them turn Papists at once—that's all. I consider Methodism, Quakerism, and the extremes of High and Low Churchism foolish, but Roman Catholicism beats them all. At the same time, allow me to tell you, that there are some Catholics who are as good as any Christians can be to whom the Bible is a sealed book, and much better than many Protestants."

When the Brontës first went to Brussels, it was with the intention of remaining there for six months, or until the *grandes* vacances[t] began in September. The duties of the school were then suspended for six weeks or two months, and it seemed a desirable period for their return. But the proposal mentioned in the foregoing letter altered their plans. Besides, they were happy in the feeling that they were making progress in all the knowledge they had so long been yearning to acquire. They were happy, too, in possessing friends whose society had been for years congenial to them; and in occasional meetings with these, they could have the inexpressible solace to residents in a foreign country—and peculiarly such to the Brontës—of talking over the intelligence received from their respective homes—referring to past, or planning for future days. Mary and her sister, the bright, dancing, laughing Martha, were parlour-boarders in an establishment just beyond the barriers of Brussels. Again, the cousins of these friends were resident in the town; and at their house Charlotte and Emily were always welcome, though their overpowering shyness prevented their more valuable qualities from being known, and generally kept them silent. They spent their weekly holiday with this family,[u] for many months; but at the end of the time, Emily was as impenetrable to friendly advances as at the beginning; while Charlotte was too physically weak (as Mary has expressed it) to "gather up her forces" sufficiently to express any difference or opposition of opinion, and had consequently an assenting and deferential manner, strangely at variance with what they knew of her remarkable talents and decided character. At this house, the T.'s and the Brontës could

look forward to meeting each other pretty frequently. There was another English family where Charlotte soon became a welcome guest, and where, I suspect, she felt herself more at her ease than either at Mrs. Jenkins', or the friends whom I have first mentioned.

An English physician, with a large family of daughters,[v] went to reside at Brussels, for the sake of their education. He placed them at Madame Héger's school in July, 1842, not a month before the beginning of the grandes vacances on August 15th. In order to make the most of their time, and become accustomed to the language, these English sisters went daily, through the holidays, to the pensionnat in the Rue d'Isabelle. Six or eight boarders remained, besides the Miss Brontës. They were there during the whole time, never even having the break to their monotonous life, which passing an occasional day with a friend would have afforded them; but devoting themselves with indefatigable diligence to the different studies in which they were engaged. Their position in the school appeared, to these new comers, analogous to what is often called a parlour-boarder. They prepared their French, drawing, German, and literature for their various masters; and to these occupations Emily added that of music, in which she was somewhat of a proficient; so much so as to be qualified to give instruction in it to the three younger sisters of my informant.

The school was divided into three classes. In the first, were from fifteen to twenty pupils; in the second, sixty was about the average number—all foreigners, excepting the two Brontës and one other; in the third, there were from twenty to thirty pupils. The first and second classes occupied a long room, divided by a wooden partition; in each division were four long ranges of desks; and at the end was the estrade, or platform for the presiding instructor. On the last row, in the quietest corner, sat Charlotte and Emily, side by side, so deeply absorbed in their studies as to be insensible to any noise or movement around them. The school-hours were from nine to twelve (the luncheon hour), when the boarders and half-boarders—perhaps two-and-thirty girls—went to the refectoire (a room with two long tables, having an oil-lamp suspended over each), to partake of bread and fruit; the externes, or morning pupils, who had brought their own refreshment with them, adjourning to eat it in the garden. From one to two, there was fancy-work—a pupil reading aloud some light literature in each room; from two

to four, lessons again. At four, the externes left; and the remaining girls dined in the refectoire, M. and Madame Heger presiding. From five to six there was recreation; from six to seven preparation for lessons; and, after that, succeeded the lecture pieuse—[w] Charlotte's night-mare. On rare occasions, M. Héger himself would come in, and substitute a book of a different and more interesting kind. At eight, there was a slight meal of water and pistolets (the delicious little Brussels rolls), which was immediately followed by prayers, and then to bed.

The principal bed-room was over the long classe, or schoolroom. There were six or eight narrow beds on each side of the apartment, every one enveloped in its white draping curtain; a long drawer, beneath each, served for a wardrobe, and between each was a stand for ewer, basin, and looking-glass. The beds of the two Miss Brontës were at the extreme end of the room, almost as private and retired as if they had been in a separate apartment.

During the hours of recreation, which were always spent in the garden, they invariably walked together, and generally kept a profound silence; Emily, though so much the taller, leaning on her sister. Charlotte would always answer when spoken to, taking the lead in replying to any remark addressed to both; Emily rarely spoke to any one. Charlotte's quiet, gentle manner never changed. She was never seen out of temper for a moment; and, occasionally, when she herself had assumed the post of English teacher, and the impertinence or inattention of her pupils was most irritating, a slight increase of colour, a momentary sparkling of the eye, and more decided energy of manner, were the only outward tokens she gave of being conscious of the annoyance to which she was subjected. But this dignified endurance of hers subdued her pupils, in the long run, far more than the voluble tirades of the other mistresses. My informant adds:—"The effect of this manner was singular. I can speak from personal experience. I was at that time high-spirited and impetuous, not respecting the French mistresses; yet, to my own astonishment, at one word from her, I was perfectly tractable; so much so, that at length M. and Madame Héger invariably preferred all their wishes to me through her; the other pupils did not, perhaps, love her as I did, she was so quiet and silent, but all respected her."

With the exception of that part which describes her manner as English teacher—an office which she did not assume for some months later—all this description of the school life of the two Brontes refers to the commencement of the new scholastic year in October, 1842; and the extracts I have given convey the first impression which the life at a foreign school, and the position of the two Miss Brontës therein, made upon an intelligent English girl of sixteen.

The first break in this life of regular duties and employments came heavily and sadly. Martha—pretty, winning, mischievous, tricksome Martha—was taken ill suddenly at the Château de Kokleberg. Her sister tended her with devoted love; but it was all in vain; in a few days she died. Charlotte's own short account of this event is as follows:—

"Martha T.'s illness was unknown to me till the day before she died. I hastened to Kokleberg the next morning—unconscious that she was in great danger—and was told that it was finished. She had died in the night. Mary was taken away to Bruxelles. I have seen Mary frequently since. She is in no ways crushed by the event; but while Martha was ill, she was to her more than a mother—more than a sister: watching, nursing, cherishing her so tenderly, so unweariedly. She appears calm and serious now; no bursts of violent emotion; no exaggeration of distress. I have seen Martha's grave—the place where her ashes lie in a foreign country."

Who that has read "Shirley" does not remember the few lines—perhaps half a page—of sad recollection?

"He has no idea that little Jessy will die young, she is so gay, and chattering, and arch—original even now; passionate when provoked, but most affectionate if caressed; by turns gentle and rattling; exacting yet generous; fearless.... yet reliant on any one who will help her. Jessy, with her little piquant face, engaging prattle, and winning ways, is made to be a pet.

* * * * * *

“Do you know this place? No, you never saw it; but you recognise the nature of these trees, this foliage—the cypress, the willow, the yew. Stone crosses like these are not unfamiliar to you, nor are these dim garlands of everlasting flowers. Here is the place; green sod and a gray marble head-stone—Jessy sleeps below. She lived through an April day; much loved was she, much loving. She often, in her brief life, shed tears—she had frequent sorrows; she smiled between, gladdening whatever saw her. Her death was tranquil and happy in Rose’s guardian arms, for Rose had been her stay and defence through many trials; the dying and the watching English girls were at that hour alone in a foreign country, and the soil of that country gave Jessy a grave.

* * * * * *

“But, Jessy, I will write about you no more. This is an autumn evening, wet and wild. There is only one cloud in the sky; but it curtains it from pole to pole. The wind cannot rest; it hurries sobbing over hills of sullen outline, colourless with twilight and mist. Rain has beat all day on that church tower” (Haworth): “it rises dark from the stony enclosure of its graveyard: the nettles, the long grass, and the tombs all drip with wet. This evening reminds me too forcibly of another evening some years ago: a howling, rainy autumn evening too—when certain who had that day performed a pilgrimage to a grave new made in a heretic cemetery, sat near a wood fire on the hearth of a foreign dwelling. They were merry and social, but they each knew that a gap, never to be filled, had been made in that circle. They knew they had lost something whose absence could never be quite atoned for, so long as they lived; and they knew that heavy falling rain was soaking into the wet earth which covered their lost darling; and that the sad, sighing gale was mourning above her buried head. The fire warmed them; Life and Friendship yet blessed them: but Jessy lay cold, coffined, solitary—only the sod screening her from the storm.”

This was the first death that had occurred in the small circle of Charlotte's immediate and intimate friends since the loss of her two sisters long ago. She was still in the midst of her deep sympathy with Mary, when word came from home that her aunt, Miss Branwell, was ailing—was very ill. Emily and Charlotte immediately resolved to go home straight, and hastily packed up for England, doubtful whether they should ever return to Brussels or not, leaving all their relations with M. and Madame Héger, and the pensionnat, uprooted, and uncertain of any future existence. Even before their departure, on the morning after they received the first intelligence of illness—when they were on the very point of starting—came a second letter telling them of their aunt's death. It could not hasten their movements, for every arrangement had been made for speed. They sailed from Antwerp; they travelled night and day, and got home on a Tuesday morning. The funeral and all was over, and Mr. Brontë and Anne were sitting together, in quiet grief for the loss of one who had done her part well in their household for nearly twenty years, and earned the regard and respect of many who never knew how much they should miss her till she was gone. The small property which she had accumulated, by dint of personal frugality and self-denial, was bequeathed to her nieces. Branwell, her darling, was to have had his share; but his reckless expenditure had distressed the good old lady, and his name was omitted in her will.

When the first shock was over, the three sisters began to enjoy the full relish of meeting again, after the longest separation they had had in their lives. They had much to tell of the past, and much to settle for the future. Anne had been for some little time in a situation, to which she was to return at the end of the Christmas holidays. For another year or so they were again to be all three apart; and, after that, the happy vision of being together and opening a school was to be realized. Of course they did not now look forward to settling at Burlington, or any other place which would take them away from their father; but the small sum which they each independently possessed would enable them to effect such alterations in the parsonage-house at Haworth as would adapt it to the reception of pupils. Anne's plans for the interval were fixed. Emily quickly decided to be the daughter to remain at home. About Charlotte there was much deliberation and some discussion.

Even in all the haste of their sudden departure from Brussels, M. Héger had found time to write a letter of sympathy to Mr. Brontë on the loss which he had just sustained; a letter containing such a graceful appreciation of the daughters' characters, under the form of a tribute of respect to their father, that I should have been tempted to copy it, even had there not also been a proposal made in it respecting Charlotte, which deserves a place in the record of her life.

"Au Reverend Monsieur Brontë, Pasteur Evangélique, &c. &c.

"Samedi, 5 9bre.

"MONSIEUR,

"Un événement bien triste decide mesdemoiselles vos filles à retourner brusquement en Angleterre, ce depart qui nous afflige beaucoup a cependant ma complete approbation; il est bien natural qu'elles cherchent à vous consoler de ce que le ciel vient de vous ôter, en se serrant autour de vous, pour mieux vous faire apprécier ce que le ciel vous a donné et ce qu'il vous laisse encore. J'espère que vous me pardonnerez, Monsieur, de profiter de cette circonstance pour vous faire prevenir l'expression de mon respect; je n'ai pas l'honneur de vous connaître personellement, et cependant j'éprouve pour votre personne un sentiment de sincere veneration, car en jugeant un père de famille par ses enfants on ne risque pas de se tromper, et sous ce rapport l'éducation et les sentiments que nous avons trouvés dans mesdemoiselles vos filles, n'ont pu que nous donner une très haute idée de votre mérite et de votre caractère. Vous apprendrez sans doute avec plaisir que vos enfants ont fait du progres tres remarquable dans toutes les branches de l'enseignement, et que ces progrès sont entierement du à leur amour pour le travail et à leur perseverance; nous n'avons eu que bien peu à faire avec de pareilles élèves; leur avancement est votre œuvre bien plus que la notre; nous n'avons pas eu à leur apprendre le prix du temps et de l'instruction, elles avaient appris tout cela dans la maison paternelle, et nous n'avons eu, pour notre part, que le faible méritede diriger leurs efforts et de

fournir un aliment convenable à la louable activité que vos filles ont puisée dans votre exemple et dans vos leçons. Puissent les éloges méritées que nous donnons à vos enfants vous être de quelque consolation dans le malheur qui vous afflige; c'est là notre espoir en vous écrivant, et ce sera, pour Mesdemoiselles Charlotte et Emily une douce et belle recompense de leurs travaux.

"En perdant nos deux chères élèves nous ne devons pas vous cacher que nous éprouvons à la fois et du chagrin et de l'inquiétude; nous sommes affligés parceque cette brusque separation vient briser l'affection presque paternelle que nous leur avons vouée, et notre peine s'augmente à la vue de tant de travaux interrompees, de tant des choses bien commencées, et qui ne demandent que quelque temps encore pour être menées à bonne fin. Dans un an, chacune de vos demoiselles eût été entièrement prémunie contre les éventualités de l'avenir; chacune d'elles acquerrait à la fois et l'instruction et la science d'enseignement; Mlle. Emily allait apprendre le piano; recevoir les leçons du meilleur professeur que nous ayons en Belgique, et déjà elle avait elle-même de petites élèves; elle perdait donc à la fois un reste d'ignorance, et un reste plus gênant encore de timidité; Mlle. Charlotte commençait à donner des leçons en français, et d'acquerir cette assurance, cet aplomb si necessaire dans l'enseignement; encore un au tout au plus, et l'œuvre était achevée et bien achevée. Alors nous aurions pu, si cela vous eût convenu, offrir a mesdemoiselles vos filles ou du moins à l'une de deux une position qui eût été dans ses gouts, et qui lui eût donne cette douce indépendance si difficile 'a trouver pour une jeune personne. Ce n'est pas, croyez le bien monsieur, ce n'est pas ici pour nous une question d'interet personnel, c'est une question d'affection; vous me pardonnerez si nous vous parlons de vos enfants, si nous nous occupons de leur avenir, comme si elles faisaient partie de notre famille; leurs qualités personnelles, leur bon vouloir, leur zèle extreme sont les seules causes qui nous poussent à nous hasarder de la sorte. Nous savons, Monsieur, que vous peserez plus mûrement et plus sagement que nous la consequence qu'aurait pour l'avenir une interruption complete dans les études de vos deux filles; vous deciderez ce qu'il faut faire, et vous nous pardonnerez notre franchise, si vous daignez considérer que le motif qui nous fait agir est une affection bien

désinterressée et qui s’affligerait beaucoup de devoir déjà se résigner à n’être plus utile à vos chers enfants.

“Agréez, je vous prie, Monsieur, d’expression respectueuse de mes sentiments de haute consideration.[9]

“C. HÉGER.”

There was so much truth, as well as so much kindness, in this letter—it was so obvious that a second year of instruction would be so far more valuable than the first, that there was no long hesitation before it was decided that Charlotte should return to Brussels.

Meanwhile, they enjoyed their Christmas all together inexpressibly. Branwell was with them; that was always a pleasure at this time; whatever might be his faults, or even his vices, his sisters yet held him up as their family hope, as they trusted that he would some day be their family pride. They blinded themselves to the magnitude of the failings of which they were now and then told, by persuading themselves that such failings were common to all men of any strength of character; for, till sad experience taught them better, they fell into the usual error of confounding strong passions with strong character.

Charlotte’s friend came over to see her, and she returned the visit. Her Brussels life must have seemed like a dream, so completely, in this short space of time, did she fall back into the old household ways: with more of household independence than she could ever have had during her aunt’s life-time. Winter though it was, the sisters took their accustomed walks on the snow-covered moors; or went often down the long road to Keighley, for such books as had been added to the library there during their absence from England.

CHAPTER XII.

Towards the end of January, the time came for Charlotte to return to Brussels. Her journey thither was rather disastrous. She had to make her way alone; and the train from Leeds to London, which should have reached Euston-square early in the afternoon, was so much delayed that it did not get in till ten at night. She had intended to seek out the Chapter Coffee-house, where she had stayed before, and which would have been near the place where the steam-boats lay; but she seems to have been frightened by the idea of arriving at an hour which, to Yorkshire notions, was so late and unseemly ; and taking a cab, therefore, at the station, she drove straight to the London Bridge Wharf, and desired a waterman to row her to the Ostend packet, which was to sail the next morning. She described to me, pretty much as she has since described it in “Villette,” her sense of loneliness, and yet her strange pleasure in the excitement of the situation, as in the dead of that winter’s night she went swiftly over the dark river to the black hull’s side, and was at first refused leave to ascend to the deck. “No passengers might sleep on board,” they said, with some appearance of disrespect. She looked back to the lights and subdued noises of London—that “Mighty Heart” in which she had no place—and, standing up in the rocking boat, she asked to speak to some one in authority on board the packet. He came, and her quiet simple statement of her wish, and her reason for it, quelled the feeling of sneering distrust in those who had first heard her request; and impressed the authority so favorably that he allowed her to come on board, and take possession of a berth. The next morning she sailed; and at seven on Sunday evening she reached the Rue d’Isabelle once more; having only left Haworth on Friday morning at an early hour.

Her salary was 161. a year; out of which she had to pay for her German lessons, for which she was charged as much (the lessons being probably rated by time) as when Emily learnt with her and divided the expense; viz., ten francs a month. By Miss Brontë’s own desire, she gave her English lessons in the classe, or school-room, without the supervision of Madame or M. Héger. They offered to be present, with a view to maintain order among the unruly Belgian girls; but she declined this, saying that she would rather

enforce discipline by her own manner and character than be indebted for obedience to the presence of a *gendarme.* She ruled over a new school-room, which had been built on the space in the play-ground adjoining the house. Over that First Class she was surveillante at all hours; and henceforward she was called *Mademoiselle* Charlotte, by M. Héger's orders. She continued her own studies, principally attending to German, and to Literature; and every Sunday she went alone to the German and English chapels. Her walks too were solitary, and principally taken in the allée défendue, where she was secure from intrusion. This solitude was a perilous luxury to one of her temperament; so liable as she was to morbid and acute mental suffering.

On March 6th, 1843, she writes thus:—

"I am settled by this time, of course. I am not too much overloaded with occupation; and besides teaching English, I have time to improve myself in German. I ought to consider myself well off, and to be thankful for my good fortunes. I hope I am thankful; and if I could always keep up my spirits, and never feel lonely, or long for companionship, or friendship, or whatever they call it, I should do very well. As I told you before, M. and Madame Héger are the only two persons in the house for whom I really experience regard and esteem, and, of course, I cannot be always with them, nor even very often. They told me, when I first returned, that I was to consider their sitting-room my sitting-room also, and to go there whenever I was not engaged in the school-room. This, however, I cannot do. In the day-time it is a public room, where music-masters and mistresses are constantly passing in and out; and in the evening, I will not, and ought not to intrude on M. and Madame Héger and their children. Thus I am a good deal by myself, out of school-hours; but that does not signify. I now regularly give English lessons to M. Héger and his brother-in-law They get on with wonderful rapidity; especially the first. He already begins to speak English very decently. If you could see and hear the efforts I make to teach them to pronounce like Englishmen, and their unavailing attempts to imitate, you would laugh to all eternity.

“The Carnival is just over, and we have entered upon the gloom and abstinence of Lent. The first day of Lent we had coffee without milk for breakfast; vinegar and vegetables, with a very little salt fish, for dinner; and bread for supper. The Carnival was nothing but masking and mummery. M. Héger took me and one of the pupils into the town to see the masks. It was animating to see the immense crowds, and the general gaiety, but the masks were nothing. I have been twice to the D.’s” (those cousins of Mary’s of whom I have before made mention). “When she leaves Bruxelles, I shall have nowhere to go to. I have had two letters from Mary. She does not tell me she has been ill, and she does not complain; but her letters are not the letters of a person in the enjoyment of great happiness. She has nobody to be as good to her as M. Héger is to me; to lend her books; to converse with her sometimes, &c.

“Good-bye. When I say so, it seems to me that you will hardly hear me; all the waves of the Channel heaving and roaring between, must deaden the sound.”

From the tone of this letter it may easily be perceived that the Brussels of 1843 was a different place from that of 1842. Then she had Emily for a daily and nightly solace and companion. She had the weekly variety of a visit to the family of the D.’s; and she had the frequent happiness of seeing Mary and Martha. Now Emily was far away in Haworth—where she, or any other loved one, might die, before Charlotte, with her utmost speed, could reach them, as experience, in her aunt’s case, had taught her. The D.’s were leaving Brussels; so, henceforth, her weekly holiday would have to be passed in the Rue d’Isabelle, or so she thought. Mary was gone off on her own independent course; Martha alone remained—still and quiet for ever, in the cemetery beyond the Porte de Louvain. The weather, too, for the first few weeks after Charlotte’s return, had been piercingly cold; and her feeble constitution was always painfully sensitive to an inclement season. Mere bodily pain, however acute, she could always put aside; but too often ill-health assailed her in a part far more to be dreaded. Her depression of spirits, when she was not well, was pitiful in its extremity. She was aware

that it was constitutional, and could reason about it; but no reason prevented her suffering mental agony, while the bodily cause remained in force.

The Hégers have discovered, since the publication of “Villette,” that, at this beginning of her career as English teacher in their school, the conduct of her pupils was often impertinent and mutinous in the highest degree. But of this they were unaware at the time, as she had declined their presence, and never made any complaint. Still, it must have been a depressing thought to her at this period, that her joyous, healthy, obtuse pupils, were so little answerable to the powers she could bring to bear upon them; and though, from their own testimony, her patience, firmness, and resolution, at length obtained their just reward, yet, with one so weak in health and spirits as she was, the reaction after such struggles as she frequently had with her pupils, must have been very sad and painful.

She thus writes to her friend E.:—

“*April*, 1843.

“Is there any talk of your coming to Brussels? During the bitter cold weather we had through February, and the principal part of March, I did not regret that you had not accompanied me. If I had seen you shivering as I shivered myself, if I had seen your hands and feet as red and swelled as mine were, my discomfort would just have been doubled. I can do very well under this sort of thing; it does not fret me; it only makes me numb and silent; but if you were to pass a winter in Belgium, you would be ill. However, more genial weather is coming now, and I wish you were here. Yet I never have pressed you, and never would press you too warmly to come. There are privations and humiliations to submit to; there is monotony and uniformity of life; and, above all, there is a constant sense of solitude in the midst of numbers. The Protestant, the foreigner, is a solitary being, whether as teacher or pupil. I do not say this by way of complaining of my own lot; for though I acknowledge that there are certain disadvantages in my present position, what position on earth is without them? And, whenever I turn back to compare what I am with what I was—my place here with my place at Mrs.—’s for instance—I am thankful. There was an

observation in your last letter which excited, for a moment, my wrath. At first, I thought it would be folly to reply to it, and I would let it die. Afterwards, I determined to give one answer, once for all. ‘Three or four people,’ it seems, ‘have the idea that the future épouse of Mademoiselle Brontë is on the Continent.’ These people are wiser than I am. They could not believe that I crossed the sea merely to return as teacher to Madame Héger’s. I must have some more powerful motive than respect for my master and mistress, gratitude for their kindness, &c., to induce me to refuse a salary of 50l. in England, and accept one of 161. in Belgium. I must, forsooth, have some remote hope of entrapping a husband somehow, or somewhere. If these charitable people knew the total seclusion of the life I lead, that I never exchange a word with any other man than Monsieur Héger, and seldom indeed with him, they would, perhaps, cease to suppose that any such chimerical and groundless notion had influenced my proceedings. Have I said enough to clear myself of so silly an imputation? Not that it is a crime to marry, or a crime to wish to be married; but it is an imbecility, which I reject with contempt, for women, who have neither fortune nor beauty, to make marriage the principal object of their wishes and hopes, and the aim of all their actions; not to be able to convince themselves that they are unattractive, and that they had better be quiet, and think of other things than wedlock.”

The following is an extract from one of the few letters which have been preserved, of her correspondence with her sister Emily.

“I get on here from day to day in a Robinson-Crusoe-like sort of way, very lonely, but that does not signify. In other respects, I have nothing substantial to complain of, nor is this a cause for complaint. I hope you are well. Walk out often on the moors. My love to Tabby I hope she keeps well.”

And about this time she wrote to her father.

“*June* 2nd, 1843.

“I was very glad to hear from home. I had begun to get low-spirited at not receiving any news, and to entertain indefinite fears that something was wrong. You do not say anything about your own health, but I hope you are well, and Emily also. I am afraid she will have a good deal of hard work to do now that Hannah” (a servant-girl who had been assisting Tabby) “is gone. I am exceedingly glad to hear that you still keep Tabby” (considerably upwards of seventy) . “It is an act of great charity to her, and I do not think it will be unrewarded, for she is very faithful, and will always serve you, when she has occasion, to the best of her abilities; besides, she will be company for Emily, who, without her, would be very lonely”

I gave a dévoir, written after she had been four months under M. Heger’s tuition. I will now copy out another, written nearly a year later, during which the progress made appears to me very great.

“31 Mai, 1843.

“Sur la nom de Napoleon. [1]

“Napoléon naquit en Corse et mourut à St. Hélène. Entre ces deux îles rien qu‘un vaste et brûlant desert et l’océan immense. Il naquit fils d‘un simple gentilhomme, et mourut empereur, mais sans couronne et dans les fers. Entre son berçeau et sa tombe qu’ y a-t-il? la carrière d’un soldat parvenu, des champs de bataille, une mer de sang, un trône, puis du sang encore, et des fers. Sa vie, c‘est l’arc en ciel; les deux points extremes touchent la terre; la comble lumineuse mesure les cieux. Sur Napoleon au berceau une mere brillait; dans la maison paternelle il avait des frères et des sœurs; plus tard dans son palais il eut une femme qui l‘aimait. Mais sur son lit de mort Napoleon est seul; plus de mere, ni de frère, ni de sœur, ni de femme, ni d’enfant!! D‘autres ont dit et rediront ses exploits, moi, je m’arrête à contempler l’abandonnement de sa dernière heure!

“Il est là, exile et captif, enchanîné sur un écueil. Nouveau Promethée il subit le châtiment de son orgueil! Promethée avait voulu être Dieu et Créateur; il déroba le feu du Ciel pour animer le corps qu‘il avait formé. Et lui, Buonaparte, il a voulu créer, non pas un homme, mais un empire, et pour donner une existence, une âme, à son œuvre gigantesque, il n’a pas hésité à arracher la vie à des nations entières. Jupiter indigné de l‘impiété de Promethée le riva vivant à la cime du Caucase. Ainsi, pour punir l’ambition rapace de Buonaparte, la Providence l’a enchaîné jusqu’a ce que mort s‘en suivit, sur un roc isolé de l’Atlantique. Peutêtre là aussi a-t-il senti lui fouillant le flanc cet insatiable vautours dont parle la fable, peutêtre a-t-il souffert aussi cette soif du cœur, cette faim de l‘âme, qui torturent l’exilé, loin de sa famille, et de sa patrie. Mais parler ainsi n‘est-ce pas attribuer gratuitement à Napoleon une humaine faiblesse qu’il n’éprouva jamais? Quand donc s’est-il laisse enchaîner par un lien d‘affection? Sans doute d’autres conquérants ont hésité dans leur carriere de gloire, arrétés par un obstacle d‘amour ou d’ amitié, retenus par la main d’une femme, rappelés par la voix d‘un ami—lui, jamais! Il n’eut pas besoin comme Ulysse, de se lier au mât du navire, ni de se boucher les oreilles avec de la cire; il ne redoutait pas le chant des Sirènes—il le dédaignait; il se fit marbre et fer pour executer ses grands projets. Napoleon ne se regardait pas comme un homme, mais comme l’incarnation d’un peuple. Il n‘aimait pas; il ne considérait ses amis et ses proches que comme des instruments auxquels il tint, tant qu’ils furent utiles, et qu‘il jeta de cote quand ils cessèrent de l’être. Qu’on ne se permette donc pas d’approcher du Sepulchre du Corse, avec sentiments de pitié, ou de souiller de larmes la pierre que couvre ses restes, son âme répudierait tout cela. On a dit, je le sais, qu’elle fut cruelle la main qui le sépara de sa femme, et de son enfant. Non, c’etait une main qui, comme la sienne, ne tremblait ni de passion ni de crainte, c’était la main d’un homme froid, con-vaincu, qui avait su deviner Buonaparte; et voici ce que disait cet homme que la défaite n’a pu humilier, ni la victoire enorgueillir. ’Marie-Louise n’est pas la femme de Napoleon; c’est la France que Napoleon a épousée; c’est la France qu’il aime, leur union enfante la perte de l’ Europe; voila la divorce que je veux; voila l’union qu’il faut briser.’

“La voix des timides et des traitres protesta contre cette sentence. ‘C’est abuser du droits de la victoire! C‘est fouler aux pieds le vaincu! Que l’Angleterre se montre clémente, qu‘elle ouvre ses bras pour recevoir comme hôte son ennemi désarmé.’ L’Angleterre aurait peutetre écouté ce conseil, car partout et toujours il y a des âmes faibles et timorées bientôt séduites par la flatterie ou effrayées par le reproche. Mais la Providence permit qu’un homme se trouvât qui n‘a jamais su ce que c’est que la crainte; qui aima sa patrie mieux que sa renommée; impenetrable devant les menaces, inaccessible aux louanges, il se présenta devant le conseil de la nation, et levant son front tranquille et haut, il osa dire: ”Que la trahison se taise! car c’est trahir que de conseiller de temporiser avec Buonaparte. Moi je sais ce que sont ces guerres dont l’Europe saigne encore, comme une victime sous le couteau du boucher. Il faut en finir avec Napoleon Buonaparte. Vous vous effrayez de tort d’un mot si dur! Je n’ai pas de magnanimité, dit-on? Soit! que m’importe ce qu’on dit de moi. Je n’ai pas ici à me faire une reputation de héros magnanime, mais à guérir si la cure est possible, l’Europe qui se meurt, épuisée de ressources et de sang, l’Europe dont vous négligez les vrais intérêts, préoccupés que vous êtes d’une vaine renommée de clémence. Vous êtes faibles. Eh bien! je viens vous aider. Envoyez Buonaparte à Ste. Héléne! n’hésitez pas, ne cherchez pas un autre endroit; c’est le seul convenable. Je vous le dis, j’ai réfléchi pour vous; c’est là qu’il doit être et non pas ailleurs. Quant à Napoleon, homme, soldat, je n’ai rien contre lui; c‘est un Lion Royal, auprès de qui vous n’ êtes que des Chacals. Mais Napoleon, Empereur, c’est autre chose, je l’extirperai du sol de l’Europe.’ Et celui qui parla ainsi toujours su garder sa promesse, celle-là, comme toutes les autres. Je l’ai dit, et je le répète, cet homme est l’egal de Napoleon par la genie; comme trempe de caractère, comme droiture, comme elevation de pensée et de but, il est d’une tout autre espèce. Napoleon Buonaparte était avide de renommée et de gloire; Arthur Wellesley ne se soucie ni de l’une, ni de l’autre l’opinion publique, la popularité, étaient choses de grand valeur aux yeux de Napoleon; pour Wellington l’opinion publique est une rumeur, un rien que le souffle de son inflexible volonté fait disparaître comme une bulle de Savoy. Napoléon flattait le peuple; Wellington le brusque; l’un cherchait les applaudissements, l’autre ne se soucie que du témoignage de sa conscience; quand elle approuve, c’est assez; toute autre louange l’obsède. Aussi ce

peuple, qui adorait Buonaparte, s’irritait, s’insurgeait contre la morgue de Wellington; parfois il lui témoigna sa colère et sa haine par des grognements, par des hurlements de bêtes fauves; et alors avec une impassibilité de sénateur Romaine, le moderne Coriolan, torsait du regard l‘émeute furieuse; il croisait ses bras nerveux sur sa large poitrine, et seul, debout sur son senil, il attendait, il bravait cette tempête populaire dont les flots venaient mourir à quelques pas de lui: et quand la foule honteuse de sa rebellion, venait lecher les pieds du maître, le hautain patricien méprisait l’hommage d’aujourd’ hui comme la haine d’hier, et dans les rues de Londres, et devant son palais ducal d’Apsley, il repoussait d’un genre plein de froid dedain l’incommode empressement du peuple enthousiaste. Cette fierté neanmoins n’excluait pas en lui une rare modestie; partout il se soustrait à l’éloge; se dérobe au panégyrique; jamais il ne parle de ses exploits, et jamais il ne souffre qu’un autre que lui en parle en sa presence. Son caractere égale en grandeur et surpasse en vérité celui de tout autre héros ancien ou moderne. La gloire de Napoleon crût en une nuit, comme la vigne de Jonah, et il suffit d’un jour pour la flétrir; la gloire de Wellington est comme les vieux chênes qui ombragent le château de ses pères sur les rives du Shannon; le chêne croit lentement; il lui faut du temps pour pousser vers le ciel ses branches noueusses, et pour enfoncer dans le sol, ces racines profondes qui s’enchevêtrent dans les fondements solides de la terre; mais alors, l’arbre séculaire, inébranlable comme le roc où il a sa base, brave et la faux du temps et l’efforte des ventes et des tempêtes. Il faudra peutêtre un siècle à l’Angleterre pour qu’elle connaisse la valeur de son héros. Dans un siècle, l’Europe entière saura combien Wellington a de droit à sa reconnoissance.“[2]

How often in writing this paper “in a strange land,” must Miss Brontë have thought of the old childish disputes in the kitchen of Haworth parsonage, touching the respective merits of Wellington and Buonaparte! Although the title given to her dévoir is, “On the Name of Napoleon,” she seems yet to have considered it a point of honour rather to sing praises to an English hero than to dwell on the character of a foreigner, placed as she was among those who cared little either for England or for Wellington. She now

felt that she had made great progress towards obtaining proficiency in the French language, which had been her main object in coming to Brussels. But to the zealous learner “Alps on Alps arise.”[x] No sooner is one difficulty surmounted than some other desirable attainment appears, and must be laboured after. A knowledge of German now became her object; and she resolved to compel herself to remain in Brussels till that was gained. The strong yearning to go home came upon her; the stronger self-denying will forbade. There was a great internal struggle; every fibre of her heart quivered in the strain to master her will; and, when she conquered herself, she remained, not like a victor calm and supreme on the throne, but like a panting, torn, and suffering victim. Her nerves and her spirits gave way. Her health became much shaken.

“*Brussels, August* 1st, 1843.

“If I complain in this letter, have mercy and don’t blame me, for, I forewarn you, I am in low spirits, and that earth and heaven are dreary and empty to me at this moment. In a few days our vacation will begin; everybody is joyous and animated at the prospect, because everybody is to go home. I know that I am to stay here during the five weeks that the holidays last, and that I shall be much alone during that time, and consequently get downcast, and find both days and nights of a weary length. It is the first time in my life that I have really dreaded the vacation. Alas! I can hardly write, I have such a dreary weight at my heart; and I do so wish to go home. Is not this childish? Pardon me, for I cannot help it. However, though I am not strong enough to bear up cheerfully, I can still bear up; and I will continue to stay (D.V)[y] some months longer, till I have acquired German; and then I hope to see all your faces again. Would that the vacation were well over! it will pass so slowly. Do have the Christian charity to write me a long, long letter; fill it with the minutest details; nothing will be uninteresting. Do not think it is because people are unkind to me that I wish to leave Belgium; nothing of the sort. Everybody is abundantly civil, but home-sickness keeps creeping over me. I cannot shake it off. Believe me very merrily, vivaciously, gaily yours.

“C. B.”

The grandes *vacances* began soon after the date of this letter, when she was left in the great deserted pensionnat, with only one teacher for a companion. This teacher, a Frenchwoman, had always been uncongenial to her; but, left to each other's sole companionship, Charlotte soon discovered that her associate was more profligate, more

In the day-time, driven abroad by loathing of her companion and by the weak restlessness of fever, she tried to walk herself into such a state of bodily fatigue as would induce sleep. So she went out, and with weary steps would traverse the Boulevards and the streets, sometimes for hours together; faltering and resting occasionally on some of the many benches placed for the repose of happy groups, or for solitary wanderers like herself. Then up again—anywhere but to the pensionnat—out to the cemetery where Martha lay—out beyond it, to the hills whence there is nothing to be seen but fields as far as the horizon. The shades of evening made her retrace her footsteps—sick for want of food, but not hungry; fatigued with long continued exercise—yet restless still, and doomed to another weary, haunted night of sleeplessness. She would thread the streets in the neighbourhood of the Rue d'Isabelle, and yet avoid it and its occupant, till as late an hour as she dare be out. At last, she was compelled to keep her bed for some days, and this compulsory rest did her good. She was weak, but less depressed in spirits than she had been, when the school re-opened, and her positive practical duties recommenced.

She writes thus—

"*October* 13, 1843.

"Mary is getting on well, as she deserves to do. I often hear from her. Her letters and yours are one of my few pleasures. She urges me very much to leave Brussels and go to her; but, at present, however tempted to take such a step, I should not feel justified in doing so. To leave a certainty for a complete uncertainty, would be to the last degree imprudent. Notwithstanding that, Brussels is indeed desolate to me now. Since the D.'s left, I have had no friend. I had, indeed, some very kind acquaintances in

the family of a Dr.—, but they too are gone now. They left in the latter part of August, and I am completely alone. I cannot count the Belgians anything. It is a curious position to be so utterly solitary in the midst of numbers. Sometimes the solitude oppresses me to an excess. One day, lately, I felt as if I could bear it no longer, and I went to Madame Héger, and gave her notice. If it had depended on her, I should certainly have soon been at liberty; but M. Héger having heard of what was in agitation, sent for me the day after, and pronounced with vehemence his decision, that I should not leave. I could not, at that time, have persevered in my intention without exciting him to anger; so I promised to stay a little while longer. How long that will be, I do not know. I should not like to return to England to do nothing. I am too old for that now; but if I could hear of a favourable opportunity for commencing a school, I think I should embrace it. We have as yet no fires here, and I suffer much from cold; otherwise, I am well in health. Mr.—will take this letter to England. He is a pretty-looking and pretty behaved young man, apparently constructed without a backbone; by which I don't allude to his corporal spine, which is all right enough, but to his character.

"I get on here after a fashion; but now that Mary D. has left Brussels, I have nobody to speak to, for I count the Belgians as nothing. Sometimes I ask myself how long shall I stay here; but as yet I have only asked the question; I have not answered it. However, when I have acquired as much German as I think fit, I think I shall pack up bag and baggage, and depart. Twinges of home-sickness cut me to the heart, every now and then. To-day the weather is glaring, and I am stupefied with a bad cold and headache. I have nothing to tell you. One day is like another in this place. I know you, living in the country, can hardly believe it is possible life can be monotonous in the centre of a brilliant capital like Brussels; but so it is. I feel it most on holidays, when all the girls and teachers go out to visit, and it sometimes happens that I am left, during several hours, quite alone, with four great desolate school-rooms at my disposition. I try to read, I try to write; but in vain. I then wander about from room to room, but the silence and loneliness of all the house weighs down one's spirits like lead. You will hardly believe that Madame Héger (good and kind as I have described her) never comes near me on these occasions. I own, I was astonished the first

time I was left alone thus; when everybody else was enjoying the pleasures of a fete day with their friends, and she knew I was quite by myself, and never took the least notice of me. Yet, I understand, she praises me very much to everybody, and says what excellent lessons I give. She is not colder to me than she is to the other teachers; but they are less dependent on her than I am. They have relations and acquaintances in Bruxelles. You remember the letter she wrote me, when I was in England? How kind and affectionate that was! is it not odd? In the mean time, the complaints I make at present are a sort of relief which I permit myself In all other respects I am well satisfied with my position, and you may say so to people who enquire after me (if any one does). Write to me, dear, whenever you can. You do a good deal when you send me a letter, for you comfort a very desolate heart."

One of the reasons for the silent estrangement between Madame Héger and Miss Brontë, in the second year of her residence at Brussels, is to be found in the fact, that the English Protestant's dislike of Romanism increased with her knowledge of it, and its effects upon those who professed it; and when occasion called for an expression of opinion from Charlotte Brontë, she was uncompromising truth.[4] Madame Héger, on the opposite side, was not merely a Roman Catholic, she was devote. Not of a warm or impulsive temperament, she was naturally governed by her conscience, rather than by her affections; and her conscience was in the hands of her religious guides. She considered any slight thrown upon her Church as blasphemy against the Holy Truth; and, though she was not given to open expression of her thoughts and feelings, yet her increasing coolness of behaviour showed how much her most cherished opinions had been wounded. Thus, although there was never any explanation of Madame Héger's change of manner, this may be given as one great reason why, about this time, Charlotte was made painfully conscious of a silent estrangement between them; an estrangement of which, perhaps, the former was hardly aware. I have before alluded to intelligence from home, calculated to distress Charlotte exceedingly with fears respecting Branwell, which I shall speak of more at large when the realization of her worst

apprehensions came to affect the daily life of herself and her sisters. I allude to the subject again here, in order that the reader may remember the gnawing, private cares, which she had to bury in her own heart; and the pain of which could only be smothered for a time under the diligent fulfilment of present duty. Another dim sorrow was faintly perceived at this time. Her father's eyesight began to fail; it was not unlikely that he might shortly become blind; more of his duty must devolve on a curate, and Mr. Brontë, always liberal, would have to pay at a higher rate than he had heretofore done for his assistance.

She wrote thus to Emily:—

"Dec. 1st, 1843.

"This is Sunday morning. They are at their idolatrous 'messe,' and I am here, that is in the Refectoire. I should like uncommonly to be in the dining-room at home, or in the kitchen, or in the back kitchen. I should like even to be cutting up the hash, with the clerk and some register people at the other table, and you standing by, watching that I put enough flour, not too much pepper, and, above all, that I save the best pieces of the leg of mutton for Tiger and Keeper, the first of which personages would be jumping about the dish and carving-knife, and the latter standing like a devouring flame on the kitchen-floor. To complete the picture, Tabby blowing the fire, in order to boil the potatoes to a sort of vegetable glue! How divine are these recollections to me at this moment! Yet I have no thought of coming home just now. I lack a real pretext for doing so; it is true this place is dismal to me, but I cannot go home without a fixed prospect when I get there; and this prospect must not be a situation; that would be jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire. You call yourself idle! absurd, absurd! ..... Is papa well? Are you well? and Tabby? You ask about Queen Victoria's visit to Brussels. I saw her for an instant flashing through the Rue Royale in a carriage and six, surrounded by soldiers. She was laughing and talking very gaily. She looked a little stout, vivacious lady, very plainly dressed, not much dignity or pretension about her. The Belgians liked her very well on the whole. They said she enlivened the sombre court of King Leopold, which is usually as gloomy as a conventicle. Write to me again soon. Tell

me whether papa really wants me very much to come home, and whether you do likewise. I have an idea that I should be of no use there—a sort of aged person upon the parish. I pray, with heart and soul, that all may continue well at Haworth; above all in our grey half-inhabited house. God bless the walls thereof! Safety, health, happiness, and prosperity to you, papa, and Tabby. Amen.

"C. B."

Towards the end of this year (1843) various reasons conspired with the causes of anxiety which have been mentioned, to make her feel that her presence was absolutely and imperatively required at home, while she had acquired all that she proposed to herself in coming to Brussels the second time; and was, moreover, no longer regarded with the former kindliness of feeling by Madame Heger. In consequence of this state of things, working down with sharp edge into a sensitive mind, she suddenly announced to that lady her immediate intention of returning to England. Both M. and Madame Héger agreed that it would be for the best, when they learnt only that part of the case which she could reveal to them—namely, Mr. Brontë's increasing blindness. But as the inevitable moment of separation from people and places, among which she had spent so many happy hours, drew near, her spirits gave way; she had the natural presentiment that she saw them all for the last time, and she received but a dead kind of comfort from being reminded by her friends that Brussels and Haworth were not so very far apart; that access from one place to the other was not so difficult or impracticable as her tears would seem to predicate; nay, there was some talk of one of Madame Héger's daughters being sent to her as a pupil if she fulfilled her intention of trying to begin a school. To facilitate her success in this plan, should she ever engage in it, M. Héger gave her a kind of diploma, dated from, and sealed with the seal of the Athénée Royale de Bruxelles, certifying that she was perfectly capable of teaching the French language, having well studied the grammar and composition thereof, and, moreover, having prepared herself for teaching by studying and practising the best methods of instruction. This certificate is dated December 29th, 1843, and on the 2nd of January, 1844, she arrived at Haworth.

On the 23rd of the month she writes as follows:—

“Every one asks me what I am going to do, now that I am returned home; and every one seems to expect that I should immediately commence a school. In truth it is what I should wish to do. I desire it above all things. I have sufficient money for the undertaking, and I hope now sufficient qualifications to give me a fair chance of success; yet I cannot yet permit myself to enter upon life—to touch the object which seems now within my reach, and which I have been so long straining to attain. You will ask me why? It is on papa’s account; he is now, as you know, getting old, and it grieves me to tell you that he is losing his sight. I have felt for some months that I ought not to be away from him; and I feel now that it would be too selfish to leave him (at least as long as Branwell and Anne are absent), in order to pursue selfish interests of my own. With the help of God, I will try to deny myself in this matter and to wait.

“I suffered much before I left Brussels. I think, however long I live, I shall not forget what the parting with M. Héger cost me. It grieved me so much to grieve him who has been so true, kind, and disinterested a friend. At parting he gave me a kind of diploma certifying my abilities as a teacher, sealed with the seal of the Athénée Royal, of which he is professor. I was surprised also at the degree of regret expressed by my Belgian pupils, when they knew I was going to leave. I did not think it had been in their phlegmatic nature..... I do not know whether you feel as I do, but there are times now when it appears to me as if all my ideas and feelings, except a few friendships and affections, are changed from what they used to be; something in me, which used to be enthusiasm, is tamed down and broken. I have fewer illusions; what I wish for now is active exertion—a stake in life. Haworth seems such a lonely, quiet spot, buried away from the world. I no longer regard myself as young—indeed, I shall soon be twenty-eight; and it seems as if I ought to be working and braving the rough realities of the world, as other people do. It is, however, my duty to restrain this feeling at present, and I will endeavour to do so.”

Of course her absent sister and brother obtained a holiday to welcome her return home, and in a few weeks she was spared to pay a visit to her friend at B. But she was far from well and strong, and the short journey of fourteen miles seems to have fatigued her greatly

Soon after she came back to Haworth, in a letter to one of the household in which she had been staying, there occurs this passage:—“Our poor little cat has been ill two days, and is just dead. It is piteous to see even an animal lying lifeless. Emily is sorry.” These few words relate to points in the characters of the two sisters, which I must dwell upon a little. Charlotte was more than commonly tender in her treatment of all dumb creatures, and they, with that fine instinct so often noticed, were invariably attracted towards her. The deep and exaggerated consciousness of her personal defects—the constitutional absence of hope, which made her slow to trust human affection, and consequently slow to respond to any manifestation of it—made her manner shy and constrained to men and women, and even to children. We have seen something of this trembling distrust of her own capability of inspiring affection, in the grateful surprise she expresses at the regret felt by her Belgian pupils at her departure. But not merely were her actions kind, her words and tones were ever gentle and caressing, towards animals; and she quickly noticed the least want of care or tenderness on the part of others towards any poor brute creature. The readers of “Shirley” may remember that it is one of the tests which the heroine applies to her lover.

“Do you know what soothsayers I would consult?” ..... “..... The little Irish beggar that comes barefoot to my door; the mouse that steals out of the cranny in my wainscot; the bird in frost and snow that pecks at my window for a crumb; the dog that licks my hand and sits beside my knee..... I know somebody to whose knee the black cat loves to climb, against whose shoulder and cheek it likes to purr. The old dog always comes out of his kennel and wags his tail, and whines affectionately when somebody passes.” [For “somebody” and “he,” read “Charlotte Brontë” and “she.”] “He quietly strokes the cat, and lets her sit while he conveniently can; and when he must disturb her by rising, he puts her softly down, and never

flings her from him roughly: he always whistles to the dog, and gives him a caress."

The feeling, which in Charlotte partook of something of the nature of an affection, was, with Emily, more of a passion. Some one speaking of her to me, in a careless kind of strength of expression, said "she never showed regard to any human creature; all her love was reserved for animals." The helplessness of an animal was its passport to Charlotte's heart; the fierce, wild, intractability of its nature was what often recommended it to Emily. Speaking of her dead sister, the former told me that from her many traits in Shirley's character were taken; her way of sitting on the rug reading, with her arm round her rough bull-dog's neck; her calling to a strange dog, running past, with hanging head and lolling tongue, to give it a merciful draught of water, its maddened snap at her, her nobly stern presence of mind, going right into the kitchen, and taking up one of Tabby's red-hot Italian irons to sear the bitten place, and telling no one, till the danger was well-nigh over, for fear of the terrors that might beset their weaker minds. All this, looked upon as a well-invented fiction in "Shirley," was written down by Charlotte with streaming eyes; it was the literal true account of what Emily had done. The same tawny bull-dog (with his "strangled whistle"), called "Tartar" in "Shirley," was "Keeper" in Haworth parsonage; a gift to Emily. With the gift came a warning. Keeper was faithful to the depths of his nature as long as he was with friends; but he who struck him with a stick or whip, roused the relentless nature of the brute, who flew at his throat forthwith, and held him there till one or the other was at the point of death. Now Keeper's household fault was this. He loved to steal up-stairs, and stretch his square, tawny limbs, on the comfortable beds, covered over with delicate white counterpanes. But the cleanliness of the parsonage arrangements was perfect; and this habit of Keeper's was so objectionable, that Emily, in reply to Tabby's remonstrances, declared that, if he was found again transgressing, she herself, in defiance of warning and his well-known ferocity of nature, would beat him so severely that he would never offend again. In the gathering dusk of an autumn evening, Tabby came, half triumphantly, half tremblingly, but in great wrath, to tell Emily that Keeper was lying on the best bed, in drowsy voluptuousness. Charlotte saw Emily's whitening face, and set mouth, but dared not speak to interfere; no one

dared when Emily's eyes glowed in that manner out of the paleness of her face, and when her lips were so compressed into stone. She went up-stairs, and Tabby and Charlotte stood in the gloomy passage below, full of the dark shadows of coming night. Down-stairs came Emily, dragging after her the unwilling Keeper, his hind legs set in a heavy attitude of resistance, held by the "scuft of his neck," but growling low and savagely all the time. The watchers would fain have spoken, but durst not, for fear of taking off Emily's attention, and causing her to avert her head for a moment from the enraged brute. She let him go, planted in a dark corner at the bottom of the stairs; no time was there to fetch stick or rod, for fear of the strangling clutch at her throat—her bare clenched fist struck against his red fierce eyes, before he had time to make his spring, and in the language of the turf, she "punished him" till his eyes were swelled up, and the half-blind, stupefied beast was led to his accustomed lair, to have his swelled head fomented and cared for by the very Emily herself. The generous dog owed her no grudge; he loved her dearly ever after; he walked first among the mourners to her funeral; he slept moaning for nights at the door of her empty room, and never, so to speak, rejoiced, dog fashion, after her death. He, in his turn, was mourned over by the surviving sister. Let us somehow hope, in half Red Indian creed, that he follows Emily now; and, when he rests, sleeps on some soft white bed of dreams, unpunished when he awakens to the life of the land of shadows.

Now we can understand the force of the words, "Our poor little cat is dead. Emily is sorry."

CHAPTER XIII.

The moors were a great resource this spring; Emily and Charlotte walked out on them perpetually, “to the great damage of our shoes, but, I hope, to the benefit of our health.” The old plan of school-keeping was often discussed in these rambles; but indoors they set with vigour to shirt-making for the absent Branwell, and pondered in silence over their past and future life. At last they came to a determination.

“I have seriously entered into the enterprise of keeping a school—or rather, taking a limited number of pupils at home. That is, I have begun in good earnest to seek for pupils. I wrote to Mrs. - (the lady with whom she had lived as governess, just before going to Brussels), ”not asking her for her daughter—I cannot do that—but informing her of my intention. I received an answer from Mr.—expressive of, I believe, sincere regret that I had not informed them a month sooner, in which case, he said, they would gladly have sent me their own daughter, and also Colonel S.’s, but that now both were promised to Miss C. I was partly disappointed by this answer, and partly gratified; indeed, I derived quite an impulse of encouragement from the warm assurance that if I had but applied a little sooner they would certainly have sent me their daughter. I own, I had misgivings that nobody would be willing to send a child for education to Haworth. These misgivings are partly done away with. I have written also to Mrs. B. and have enclosed the diploma which M. Héger gave me before I left Brussels. I have not yet received her answer, but I wait for it with some anxiety. I do not expect that she will send me any of her children, but if she would, I dare say she could recommend me other pupils. Unfortunately, she knows us only very slightly. As soon as I can get an assurance of only one pupil, I will have cards of terms printed, and will commence the repairs necessary in the house. I wish all that to be done before winter. I think of fixing the board and English education at 251. per annum.”

Again, at a later date, July 24th, in the same year, she writes:—

“I am driving on with my small matter as well as I can. I have written to all the friends on whom I have the slightest claim, and to some on whom I have no claim; Mrs. B. for example. On her, also, I have actually made bold to call. She was exceedingly polite; regretted that her children were already at school at Liverpool; thought the undertaking a most praiseworthy one, but feared I should have some difficulty in making it succeed, on account of the situation. Such is the answer I receive from almost every one. I tell them the retired situation is, in some points of view, an advantage; that were it in the midst of a large town I could not pretend to take pupils on terms so moderate (Mrs. B. remarked that she thought the terms very moderate), but that, as it is, not having house-rent to pay, we can offer the same privileges of education that are to be had in expensive seminaries, at little more than half their price; and as our number must be limited, we can devote a large share of time and pains to each pupil. Thank you for the very pretty little purse you have sent me. I make to you a curious return in the shape of half a dozen cards of terms. Make such use of them as your judgment shall dictate. You will see that I have fixed the sum at 351., which I think is the just medium, considering advantages and disadvantages.”

This was written in July; August, September, and October passed away, and no pupils were to be heard of. Day after day, there was a little hope felt by the sisters until the post came in. But Haworth village was wild and lonely, and the Brontës but little known, owing to their want of connections. Charlotte writes on the subject, in the early winter months, to this effect :-

“I, Emily, and Anne, are truly obliged to you for the efforts you have made in our behalf; and if you have not been successful, you are only like ourselves. Every one wishes us well; but there are no pupils to be had. We have no present intention, however, of breaking our hearts on the subject, still less of feeling mortified at defeat. The effort must be beneficial, whatever the result may be, because it teaches us experience, and an additional knowledge of this world. I send you two more circulars.”

A month later, she says:—

"We have made no alternations yet in our house. It would be folly to do so, while there is so little likelihood of our ever getting pupils. I fear you are giving yourself too much trouble on our account. Depend upon it, if you were to persuade a mamma to bring her child to Haworth, the aspect of the place would frighten her, and she would probably take the dear girl back with her, instanter. We are glad that we have made the attempt, and we will not be cast down because it has not succeeded."

There were, probably, growing up in each sister's heart, secret unacknowledged feelings of relief, that their plan had not succeeded. Yes! a dull sense of relief that their cherished project had been tried and had failed. For that house, which was to be regarded as an occasional home for their brother, could hardly be a fitting residence for the children of strangers. They had, in all likelihood, become silently aware that his habits were such as to render his society at times most undesirable. Possibly, too, they had, by this time, heard distressing rumours concerning the cause of that remorse and agony of mind, which at times made him restless and unnaturally merry, at times rendered him moody and irritable.

In January, 1845, Charlotte says:—"Branwell has been quieter and less irritable, on the whole, this time than he was in summer. Anne is, as usual, always good, mild, and patient." The deep-seated pain which he was to occasion to his relations had now taken a decided form, and pressed heavily on Charlotte's health and spirits. Early in this year, she went to H. to bid good-by to her dear friend Mary, who was leaving England for Australia.[z] But a weight hung over her—[1] the gloom preceding the full knowledge of sin in which her brother was an accomplice; which was dragging him down to confirmed habits of intemperance; yet by which he was so bewitched, that no remonstrance, however stern, on the part of others—no temporary remorse, however keen—could make him shake off the infatuation that bound him.

The story must be told.[2] If I could, I would have avoided it; but not merely is it so well known to many living as to be, in a manner, public property, but it is possible that, by revealing the misery, the gnawing, life-long misery, the degrading habits, the early death of her partner in guilt—the acute and long-enduring agony of his family—to the wretched woman, who not only survives, but passes about in the gay circles of London society, as a vivacious, well-dressed, flourishing widow, there may be awakened in her some feelings of repentance.

Branwell, I have mentioned, had obtained a situation as a private tutor. Full of available talent, a brilliant talker, a good writer, apt at drawing, ready of appreciation, and with a not unhandsome person, he took the fancy of a married woman, nearly twenty years older than himself It is no excuse for him to say that she began the first advances, and “made love” to him. She was so bold and hardened, that she did it in the very presence of her children, fast approaching to maturity; and they would threaten her that, if she did not grant them such and such indulgences, they would tell their bed ridden father “how she went on with Mr. Brontë.’, He was so beguiled by this mature and wicked woman, that he went home for his holidays reluctantly, stayed there as short a time as possible, perplexing and distressing them all by his extraordinary conduct—at one time in the highest spirits, at another, in the deepest depression—accusing himself of blackest guilt and treachery without specifying what they were; and altogether evincing an irritability of disposition bordering on insanity

Charlotte and her sister suffered acutely from his mysterious behaviour. He expressed himself more than satisfied with his situation; he was remaining in it for a longer time than he had ever done in any kind of employment before; so they could not conjecture that anything there made him so wilful and restless, and full of both levity and misery. But a sense of something wrong connected with him, sickened and oppressed them. They began to lose all hope in his future career. He was no longer the family pride; an indistinct dread was creeping over their minds that he might turn out their deep disgrace. But, I believe, they shrank from any attempt to define their fears, and spoke of him to each other as little as possible. They could not help but think, and mourn, and wonder.

“Feb. 20, 1845.

“I spent a week at H., not very pleasantly; headache, sickliness, and flatness of spirits, made me a poor companion, a sad drag on the vivacious and loquacious gaiety of all the other inmates of the house. I never was fortunate enough to be able to rally, for as much as a single hour, while I was there. I am sure all, with the exception perhaps of Mary, were very glad when I took my departure. I begin to perceive that I have too little life in me, now-a-days, to be fit company for any except very quiet people. Is it age, or what else, that changes me so?”

Alas! she hardly needed to have asked this question. How could she be otherwise than “flat-spirited,” “a poor companion,” and a “sad drag” on the gaiety of those who were light-hearted and happy! Her honest plan for earning her own livelihood had fallen away, crumbled to ashes; after all her preparations, not a pupil had offered herself; and, instead of being sorry that this wish of many years could not be realized, she had reason to be glad. Her poor father, nearly sightless, depended upon her cares in his blind helplessness; but this was a sacred pious charge, the duties of which she was blessed in fulfilling. The black gloom hung over what had once been the brightest hope of the family—over Branwell, and the mystery in which his wayward conduct was enveloped. Somehow and sometime, he would have to turn to his home as a hiding place for shame; such was the sad foreboding of his sisters. Then how could she be cheerful, when she was losing her dear and noble Mary, for such a length of time and distance of space that her heart might well prophesy that it was “for ever”? Long before, she had written of Mary T., that she “was full of feelings noble, warm, generous, devoted, and profound. God bless her! I never hope to see in this world a character more truly noble. She would die willingly for one she loved. Her intellect and attainments are of the very highest standard.” And this was the friend whom she was to lose! Hear that friend’s account of their final interview:—

“When I last saw Charlotte (Jan. 1845), she told me she had quite decided to stay at home. She owned she did not like it. Her health was weak. She

said she should like any change at first, as she had liked Brussels at first, and she thought that there must be some possibility for some people of having a life of more variety and more communion with human kind, but she saw none for her. I told her very warmly, that she ought not to stay at home; that to spend the next five years at home, in solitude and weak health, would ruin her; that she would never recover it. Such a dark shadow came over her face when I said, ‘Think of what you’ll be five years hence!’ that I stopped, and said, ‘Don’t cry, Charlotte!’ She did not cry, but went on walking up and down the room, and said in a little while, ‘But I intend to stay, Polly.’ ”

A few weeks after she parted from Mary, she gives this account of her days at Haworth.

“March 24, 1845.

“I can hardly tell you how time gets on at Haworth. There is no event whatever to mark its progress. One day resembles another; and all have heavy, lifeless physiognomies. Sunday, baking-day, and Saturday, are the only ones that have any distinctive mark. Meantime, life wears away I shall soon be thirty; and I have done nothing yet. Sometimes I get melancholy at the prospect before and behind me. Yet it is wrong and foolish to repine. Undoubtedly, my duty directs me to stay at home for the present. There was a time when Haworth was a very pleasant place to me; it is not so now. I feel as if we were all buried here. I long to travel; to work; to live a life of action. Excuse me, dear, for troubling you with my fruitless wishes. I will put by the rest, and not trouble you with them. You must write to me. If you knew how welcome your letters are, you would write very often. Your letters, and the French newspapers, are the only messengers that come to me from the outer world beyond our moors; and very welcome messengers they are.”

One of her daily employments was to read to her father, and it required a little gentle diplomacy on her part to effect this duty; for there were times

when the offer of another to do what he had been so long accustomed to do for himself, reminded him only too painfully of the deprivation under which he was suffering. And, in secret, she, too, dreaded a similar loss for herself. Long-continued ill health, a deranged condition of the liver, her close application to minute drawing and writing in her younger days, her now habitual sleeplessness at nights, the many bitter noiseless tears she had shed over Branwell's mysterious and distressing conduct—all these causes were telling on her poor eyes; and about this time she thus writes to M. Héger:—[3]

"Il n'y a rien que je craigns comme le désœuvrement, l'inertie la léthargie des facultés. Quand le corps est paresseux 1'esprit souffre cruellement; je ne connaîtrais pas cetto léthargie, si je pouvais écrire. Autrefois je passais des journées des semaines, des mois entiers à écrire, et pas tout à fait sans fruit, puisque Southey et Coleridge, deux de nos meilleurs auteurs à qui j'ai envoyé certain manuscrits, en ont bien voulu témoigner leur approbation; mais à present, j'ai la vue trop faible; si j' écrivais beaucoup je deviendrai aveugle. Cette faiblesse de vue est pour moi une terrible privation; sans cela, savez-vous ce que je ferais, Monsieur? J' écrirais un livre et je le dédiearais à mon maître de litterature, au seul maître que j'aie jamais eu—à vous, Monsieur! Je vous ai dit souvent en français combien je vous respecte, combien je suis redevable à votre bonté, à vos conseils. Je voudrai le dire une fois en Anglais. Cela ne se peut pas; il ne faut pas y penser. La carrière des lettres m'est fermée..... N'oubliez pas de me dire comment vous vous portez, comment madame et les enfants se portent? Je compte bientôt avoir de vos nouvelles; cette idée me souris, car le souvenir de vos bontés ne s'effacera jamais de ma mémoire, et tant que ce souvenir durera le respect que vous m'avez inspire durera aussi. Agréez, Monsieur, &c."[4]

It is probable, that even her sisters and most intimate friends did not know of this dread of ultimate blindness which beset her at this period. What eyesight she had to spare she reserved for the use of her father. She did but

little plain-sewing; not more writing than could be avoided; and employed herself principally in knitting.

"April 2, 1845.

"I see plainly it is proved to us that there is scarcely a draught of unmingled happiness to be had in this world. -'s illness comes with -'s marriage. Mary T. finds herself free, and on that path to adventure and exertion to which she has so long been seeking admission. Sickness, hardship, danger, are her fellow travellers—her inseparable companions. She may have been out of the reach of these S.W N.W gales, before they began to blow, or they may have spent their fury on land, and not ruffled the sea much. If it has been otherwise, she has been sorely tossed, while we have been sleeping in our beds, or lying awake thinking about her. Yet these real, material dangers, when once past, leave in the mind the satisfaction of having struggled with difficulty, and overcome it. Strength, courage, and experience are their invariable results; whereas, I doubt whether suf fering purely mental has any good result, unless it be to make us by comparison less sensitive to physical suffering..... Ten years ago, I should have laughed at your account of the blunder you made in mistaking the bachelor doctor for a married man. I should have certainly thought you scrupulous overmuch, and wondered how you could possibly regret being civil to a decent individual, merely because he happened to be single instead of double. Now, however, I can perceive that your scruples are founded on common sense. I know that if women wish to escape the stigma of husband-seeking, they must act and look like marble or clay—cold, expressionless, bloodless; for every appearance of feeling, of joy, sorrow, friendliness, antipathy, admiration, disgust, are alike construed by the world into the attempt to hook a husband. Never mind! well-meaning women have their own consciences to comfort them after all. Do not, therefore, be too much afraid of showing yourself as you are, affectionate and good-hearted; do not too harshly repress sentiments and feelings excellent in themselves, because you fear that some puppy may fancy that you are letting them come out to fascinate him; do not condemn yourself to live only by halves, because if you showed too much animation some pragmatical thing in breeches might

take it into his pate to imagine that you designed to dedicate your life to inanity. Still, a composed, decent, equable deportment is a capital treasure to a woman, and that you possess. Write again soon, for I feel rather fierce, and want stroking down."

"June 13, 1845.

"As to the Mrs. -, who, you say, is like me, I somehow feel no leaning to her at all. I never do to people who are said to be like me, because I have always a notion that they are only like me in the disagreeable, outside, first-acquaintance part of my character; in those points which are obvious to the ordinary run of people, and which I know are not pleasing. You say she is 'clever'—'a clever person.' How I dislike the term! It means rather a shrewd, very ugly, meddling, talking woman..... I feel reluctant to leave papa for a single day. His sight diminishes weekly; and can it be wondered at that, as he sees the most precious of his faculties leaving him, his spirits sometimes sink? It is so hard to feel that his few and scanty pleasures must all soon go. He has now the greatest difficulty in either reading or writing; and then he dreads the state of dependence to which blindness will inevitably reduce him. He fears that he will be nothing in his parish. I try to cheer him; sometimes I succeed temporarily, but no consolation can restore his sight, or atone for the want of it. Still he is never peevish, never impatient; only anxious and dejected."

For the reason just given, Charlotte declined an invitation to the only house to which she was now ever asked to come. In answer to her correspondent's reply to this letter, she says:—

"You thought I refused you coldly, did you? It was a queer sort of coldness, when I would have given my ears to say Yes, and was obliged to say No. Matters, however, are now a little changed. Anne is come home, and her presence certainly makes me feel more at liberty. Then, if all be well, I will come and see you. Tell me only when I must come. Mention the week and the day. Have the kindness also to answer the following queries,

if you can. How far is it from Leeds to Sheffield? Can you give me a notion of the cost? Of course, when I come, you will let me enjoy your own company in peace, and not drag me out a-visiting. I have no desire at all to see your curate. I think he must be like all the other curates I have seen; and they seem to be a self-seeking, vain, empty race. At this blessed moment, we have no less than three of them in Haworth parish—and there is not one to mend another. The other day, they all three, accompanied by Mr. S., dropped, or rather rushed, in unexpectedly to tea. It was Monday (baking-day) , and I was hot and tired; still, if they had behaved quietly and decently, I would have served them out their tea in peace; but they began glorifying themselves, and abusing Dissenters in such a manner, that my temper lost its balance, and I pronounced a few sentences sharply and rapidly, which struck them all dumb. Papa was greatly horrified also, but I don't regret it."

On her return from this short visit to her friend, she travelled with a gentleman in the railway carriage, whose features and bearing betrayed him, in a moment, to be a Frenchman. She ventured to ask him if such was not the case; and, on his admitting it, she further inquired if he had not passed a considerable time in Germany, and was answered that he had; her quick ear detected something of the thick guttural pronunciation, which, Frenchmen say, they are able to discover even in the grandchildren of their countrymen who have lived any time beyond the Rhine. Charlotte had retained her skill in the language by the habit of which she thus speaks to M. Héger:-

"Je crains beaucoup d'oublier le français-j' apprends tous les jours une demi page de français par cœur, et j'ai grand plaisir à apprendre cette leçon. Veuillez presenter à Madame l' assurance de mon estime; je crains que Marie Louise et Claire ne m'aient dèja oubliée; mais je vous reverrai un jour; aussitot que j'aurais gagné assez d'argent pour aller à Bruxelles, j'y irai."[5]

And so her journey back to Haworth, after the rare pleasure of this visit to her friend, was pleasantly beguiled by conversation with the French gentleman; and she arrived at home refreshed and happy What to find there?

It was ten o'clock when she reached the parsonage. Branwell was there, unexpectedly, very ill. He had come home a day or two before, apparently for a holiday; in reality, I imagine, because some discovery had been made which rendered his absence imperatively desirable. The day of Charlotte's return, he had received a letter from Mr. -, [aa] sternly dismissing him, intimating that his proceedings were discovered, characterizing them as bad beyond expression, and charging him, on pain of exposure, to break off immediately, and for ever, all communication with every member of the family.

All the disgraceful details came out. Branwell was in no state to conceal his agony of remorse, or, strange to say, his agony of guilty love, from any dread of shame. He gave passionate way to his feelings; he shocked and distressed those loving sisters inexpressibly; the blind father sat stunned, sorely tempted to curse the profligate woman, who had tempted his boy-his only son-into the deep disgrace of deadly crime.

All the variations of spirits and of temper—the reckless gaiety, the moping gloom of many months, were now explained. There was a reason deeper than any mere indulgence of appetite, to account for his intemperance; he began his career as an habitual drunkard to drown remorse.

The pitiable part, as far as he was concerned, was the yearning love he still bore to the woman who had got so strong a hold upon him. It is true, that she professed equal love; we shall see how her professions held good. There was a strange lingering of conscience, when meeting her clandestinely by appointment at Harrogate some months after, he refused to consent to the elopement which she proposed; there was some good left in this corrupted, weak young man, even to the very last of his miserable days. The case presents the reverse of the usual features; the man became the victim; the man's life was blighted, and crushed out of him by suffering,

and guilt entailed by guilt; the man's family were stung by keenest shame. The woman-to think of her father's pious name—[ab] the blood of honourable families mixed in her veins—her early home, underneath whose roof-tree sat those whose names are held saintlike for their good deeds,—she goes flaunting about to this day in respectable society; a showy woman for her age; kept afloat by her reputed wealth. I see her name in county papers, as one of those who patronize the Christmas balls; and I hear of her in London drawing-rooms. Now let us read, not merely of the suffering of her guilty accomplice, but of the misery she caused to innocent victims, whose premature deaths may, in part, be laid at her door.

"We have had sad work with Branwell. He thought of nothing but stunning or drowning his agony of mind. No one in this house could have rest; and, at last, we have been obliged to send him from home for a week, with some one to look after him. He has written to me this morning, expressing some sense of contrition.... but as long as he remains at home, I scarce dare hope for peace in the house. We must all, I fear, prepare for a season of distress and disquietude. When I left you, I was strongly impressed with the feeling that I was going back to sorrow."

"August, 1845.

"Things here at home are much as usual; not very bright, as it regards Branwell, though his health, and consequently his temper, have been somewhat better this last day or two, because he is now forced to abstain."

"August 18th, 1845.

"I have delayed writing, because I have no good news to communicate. My hopes ebb low indeed about Branwell. I sometimes fear he will never be fit for much. The late blow to his prospects and feelings has quite made him reckless. It is only absolute want of means that acts as any check to him. One ought, indeed, to hope to the very last; and I try to do so, but occasionally hope in his case seems so fallacious."

“Nov. 4th, 1845.

“I hoped to be able to ask you to come to Haworth. It almost seemed as if Branwell had a chance of getting employment, and I waited to know the result of his efforts in order to say, dear -, come and see us. But the place (a secretaryship to a railway committee) is given to another person. Branwell still remains at home; and while he is here, you shall not come. I am more confirmed in that resolution the more I see of him. I wish I could say one word to you in his favour, but I cannot. I will hold my tongue. We are all obliged to you for your kind suggestion about Leeds; but I think our school schemes are, for the present, at rest.”

“Dec. 31, 1845.

“You say well, in speaking of -, that no sufferings are so awful as those brought on by dissipation; alas! I see the truth of this observation daily proved. and must have as weary and burdensome a life of it in waiting upon their unhappy brother. It seems grievous, indeed, that those who have not sinned should suffer so largely.”

Thus ended the year 1845.

I may as well complete here the narrative of the outward events of Branwell Brontë’s life. A few months later (I have the exact date, but, for obvious reasons, withhold it) the invalid husband of the woman with whom he had intrigued, died. Branwell had been looking forward to this event with guilty hope. After her husband’s death, his paramour would be free; strange as it seems, the young man still loved her passionately, and now he imagined the time was come when they might look forward to being married, and might live together without reproach or blame. She had offered to elope with him; she had written to him perpetually; she had sent him money—twenty pounds at a time; he remembered the criminal advances she had made; she had braved shame, and her children’s menaced disclosures, for his sake; he thought she must love him; he little knew how bad a depraved woman can be. Her husband had made a will, in which what property he left to her was bequeathed solely on the condition that she

should never see Branwell Brontë again.[6] At the very time when the will was read, she did not know but that he might be on his way to her, having heard of her husband's death. She despatched a servant in hot haste to Haworth. He stopped at the Black Bull, and a messenger was sent up to the parsonage for Branwell. He came down to the little inn, and was shut up with the man for some time. Then the groom came out, paid his bill, mounted his horse, and was off. Branwell remained in the room alone. More than an hour elapsed before sign or sound was heard; then, those outside heard a noise like the bleating of a calf, and, on opening the door, he was found in a kind of fit, succeeding to the stupor of grief which he had fallen into on hearing that he was forbidden by his paramour ever to see her again, as, if he did, she would forfeit her fortune. Let her live and flourish! He died, his pockets filled with her letters, which he had carried perpetually about his person, in order that he might read them as often as he wished. He lies dead; and his doom is only known to God's mercy.

When I think of him, I change my cry to heaven. Let her live and repent! That same mercy is infinite.

For the last three years of Branwell's life, he took opium habitually, by way of stunning conscience: he drank, moreover, whenever he could get the opportunity. The reader may say that I have mentioned his tendency to intemperance long before. It is true; but it did not become habitual, as far as I can learn, until after the commencement of his guilty intimacy with the woman of whom I have been speaking. If I am mistaken on this point, her taste must have been as depraved as her principles. He took opium, because it made him forget for a time more effectually than drink; and, besides, it was more portable. In procuring it he showed all the cunning of the opium-eater. He would steal out while the family were at church—to which he had professed himself too ill to go—and manage to cajole the village druggist out of a lump; or, it might be, the carrier had unsuspiciously brought him some in a packet from a distance. For some time before his death he had attacks of delirium tremens of the most frightful character; he slept in his father's room, and he would sometimes declare that either he or his father should be dead before morning. The trembling sisters, sick with fright, would implore their father not to expose himself to this danger; but Mr. Brontë is no timid man, and perhaps he felt that he could possibly influence

his son to some self-restraint, more by showing trust in him than by showing fear. The sisters often listened for the report of a pistol in the dead of the night, till watchful eye and hearkening ear grew heavy and dull with the perpetual strain upon their nerves. In the mornings young Brontë would saunter out, saying, with a drunkard's incontinence of speech, "The poor old man and I have had a terrible night of it; he does his best—the poor old man! but it's all over with me;" (whimpering) "it's her fault, her fault." All that is to be said more about Branwell Brontë, shall be said by Charlotte herself, not by me.

CHAPTER XIV.

In the course of this sad autumn of 1845, a new interest came up; faint, indeed, and often lost sight of in the vivid pain and constant pressure of anxiety respecting their brother. In the biographical notice of her sisters, which Charlotte prefixed to the edition of “Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey,” published in 1850—a piece of writing unique, as far as I know, in its pathos and its power—she says:—

“One day in the autumn of 1845, I accidentally lighted on a MS. volume of verse, in my sister Emily’s hand-writing. Of course, I was not surprised, knowing that she could and did write verse: I looked it over, and something more than surprise seized me-a deep conviction that these were not common effusions, nor at all like the poetry women generally write. I thought them condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine. To my ear they had also a peculiar music, wild, melancholy, and elevating. My sister Emily was not a person of demonstrative character, nor one, on the recesses of whose mind and feelings, even those nearest and dearest to her could, with impunity, intrude unlicensed: it took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication..... Meantime, my younger sister quietly produced some of her own compositions, intimating that since Emily’s had given me pleasure, I might like to look at hers. I could not but be a partial judge, yet I thought that these verses too had a sweet sincere pathos of their own. We had very early cherished the dream of one day being authors..... We agreed to arrange a small selection of our poems, and, if possible, get them printed. Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names, positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because-without at the time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called ‘feminine,’—we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we noticed how critics sometimes use for their

chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise. The bringing out of our little book was hard work. As was to be expected, neither we nor our poems were at all wanted; but for this we had been prepared at the outset; though inexperienced ourselves, we had read the experience of others. The great puzzle lay in the difficulty of getting answers of any kind from the publishers to whom we applied. Being greatly harassed by this obstacle, I ventured to apply to the Messrs. Chambers, of Edinburgh, for a word of advice; they may have forgotten the circumstance, but I have not, for from them I received a brief and business-like, but civil and sensible reply, on which we acted, and at last made way."

I inquired from Mr. Robert Chambers, and found, as Miss Brontë conjectured, that he had entirely forgotten the application which had been made to him and his brother for advice; nor had they any copy or memorandum of the correspondence.

There is an intelligent man living in Haworth,[1] who has given me some interesting particulars relating to the sisters about this period. He says:—

"I have known Miss Brontë, as Miss Brontë, a long time; indeed, ever since they came to Haworth in 1819. But I had not much acquaintance with the family till about 1843, when I began to do a little in the stationery line. Nothing of that kind could be had nearer than Keighley before I began. They used to buy a great deal of writing paper, and I used to wonder whatever they did with so much. I sometimes thought they contributed to the Magazines. When I was out of stock, I was always afraid of their coming: they seemed so distressed about it, if I had none. I have walked to Halifax (a distance of 10 miles) many a time, for half a ream of paper, for fear of being without it when they came. I could not buy more at a time for want of capital. I was always short of that. I did so like them to come when I had anything for them; they were so much different to anybody else; so gentle and kind, and so very quiet. They never talked much. Charlotte sometimes would sit and inquire about our circumstances so kindly and feelingly?.... Though I am a poor working man (which I have never felt to

be any degradation), I could talk with her with the greatest freedom. I always felt quite at home with her. Though I never had any school education, I never felt the want of it in her company."

The publishers to whom she finally made a successful application for the production of "Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell's poems," were Messrs. Aylott and Jones, Paternosterrow. Mr. Aylott has kindly placed the letters which she wrote to him on the subject at my disposal. The first is dated January 28th, 1846, and in it she inquires if they will publish one volume octavo of poems; if not at their own risk, on the author's account. It is signed "C. Brontë." They must have replied pretty speedily, for on January 31 1 st she writes again:—

"GENTLEMEN,

"Since you agree to undertake the publication of the work respecting which I applied to you, I should wish now to know, as soon as possible, the cost of paper and printing. I will then send the necessary remittance, together with the manuscript. I should like it to be printed in one octavo volume, of the same quality of paper and size of type as Moxon's last edition of Wordsworth. The poems will occupy, I should think, from 200 to 250 pages. They are not the production of a clergyman, nor are they exclusively of a religious character; but I presume these circumstances will be immaterial. It will, perhaps, be necessary that you should see the manuscript, in order to calculate accurately the expense of publication; in that case I will send it immediately. I should like, however, previously, to have some idea of the probable cost; and if, from what I have said, you can make a rough calculation on the subject, I should be greatly obliged to you."

In her next letter, February 6th, she says:—

“You will perceive that the poems are the work of three persons, relatives —their separate pieces are distinguished by their respective signatures.”

She writes again on February 15th; and on the 16th she says:—

“The MS. will certainly form a thinner volume than I had anticipated. I cannot name another model which I should like it precisely to resemble, yet, I think, a duodecimo form, and a somewhat reduced, though still clear type, would be preferable. I only stipulate for clear type, not too small; and good paper.”

On February 21 st she selects the “long primer type” for the poems, and will remit 311. 1 Os. in a few days.

Minute as the details conveyed in these notes are, they are not trivial, because they afford such strong indications of character. If the volume was to be published at their own risk, it was necessary that the sister conducting the negotiation should make herself acquainted with the different kinds of type, and the various sizes of books. Accordingly she bought a small volume, from which to learn all she could on the subject of preparation for the press. No half-knowledge—no trusting to other people for decisions which she could make for herself; and yet a generous and full confidence, not misplaced, in the thorough probity of Messrs. Aylott and Jones. The caution in ascertaining the risk before embarking in the enterprise, and the prompt payment of the money required, even before it could be said to have assumed the shape of a debt, were both parts of a self-reliant and independent character. Self-contained also was she. During the whole time that the volume of poems was in the course of preparation and publication, no word was written telling anyone, out of the household circle what was in progress.

I have had some of the letters placed in my hands, which she addressed to her old school-mistress, Miss Wooler. They begin a little before this time. Acting on the conviction, which I have all along entertained, that where Charlotte Brontë’s own words could be used, no others ought to take their place, I shall make extracts from this series, according to their dates.

“January 30th, 1846.

“MY DEAR MISS WOOLER,

“I have not yet paid my visit to -; it is, indeed, more than a year since I was there, but I frequently hear from E., and she did not fail to tell me that you were gone into Worcestershire; she was unable, however, to give me your exact address. Had I known it, I should have written to you long since. I thought you would wonder how we were getting on, when you heard of the railway panic,[2] and you may be sure that I am very glad to be able to answer your kind inquiries by an assurance that our small capital is as yet undiminished. The York and Midland is, as you say, a very good line; yet, I confess to you, I should wish, for my own part, to be wise in time. I cannot think that even the very best lines will continue for many years at their present premiums; and I have been most anxious for us to sell our shares ere it be too late, and to secure the proceeds in some safer, if, for the present, less profitable investment. I cannot, however, persuade my sisters to regard the affair precisely from my point of view; and I feel as if I would rather run the risk of loss than hurt Emily’s feelings by acting in direct opposition to her opinion. She managed in a most handsome and able manner for me, when I was in Brussels, and prevented by distance from looking after my own interests; therefore, I will let her manage still, and take the consequences. Disinterested and energetic she certainly is; and if she be not quite so tractable or open to conviction as I could wish, I must remember perfection is not the lot of humanity; and as long as we can regard those we love, and to whom we are closely allied, with profound and never-shaken esteem, it is a small thing that they should vex us occasionally by what appear to us unreasonable and headstrong notions.

“You, my dear Miss Wooler, know full as well as I do, the value of sisters’ affection to each other; there is nothing like it in this world, I believe, when they are nearly equal in age, and similar in education, tastes, and sentiments. You ask about Branwell; he never thinks of seeking employment, and I begin to fear that he has rendered himself incapable of

filling any respectable station in life; besides, if money were at his disposal, he would use it only to his own injury; the faculty of self-government is, I fear, almost destroyed in him. You ask me if I do not think that men are strange beings? I do, indeed. I have often thought so; and I think, too, that the mode of bringing them up is strange: they are not sufficiently guarded from temptation. Girls are protected as if they were something very frail or silly indeed, while boys are turned loose on the world, as if they, of all beings in existence, were the wisest and least liable to be led astray. I am glad you like Bromsgrove, though, I dare say, there are few places you would not like, with Mrs. M. for a companion. I always feel a peculiar satisfaction when I hear of your enjoying yourself, because it proves that there really is such a thing as retributive justice even in this world. You worked hard; you denied yourself all pleasure, almost all relaxation, in your youth, and in the prime of life; now you are free, and that while you have still, I hope, many years of vigour and health in which you can enjoy freedom. Besides, I have another and very egotistical motive for being pleased: it seems that even 'a lone woman' can be happy, as well as cherished wives and proud mothers. I am glad of that. I speculate much on the existence of unmarried and never-to-be-married women now-a-days; and I have already got to the point of considering that there is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman, who makes her own way through life quietly, perseveringly, without support of husband or brother; and who, having attained the age of forty-five or upwards, retains in her possession a well-regulated mind, a disposition to enjoy simple pleasures, and fortitude to support inevitable pains, sympathy with the sufferings of others, and willingness to relieve want as far as her means extend."

During the time that the negotiation with Messrs. Aylott and Co. was going on, Charlotte went to visit her old school-friend, with whom she was in such habits of confidential intimacy; but, neither then nor afterwards, did she ever speak to her of the publication of the poems; nevertheless, this young lady suspected that the sisters wrote for magazines; and in this idea she was confirmed when, on one of her visits to Haworth, she saw Anne

with a number of “Chambers’s Journal,” and a gentle smile of pleasure stealing over her placid face as she read.

“What is the matter?” asked the friend. “Why do you smile?”

“Only because I see they have inserted one of my poems,” was the quiet reply; and not a word more was said on the subject.

To this friend Charlotte addressed the following letters :—

“March 3, 1846.

“I reached home a little after two o’clock, all safe and right yesterday; I found papa very well; his sight much the same. Emily and Anne were gone to Keighley to meet me; unfortunately, I had returned by the old road, while they were gone by the new, and we missed each other. They did not get home till half-past four, and were caught in the heavy shower of rain which fell in the afternoon. I am sorry to say Anne has taken a little cold in consequence, but I hope she will soon be well. Papa was much cheered by my report of Mr. C.’s opinion, and of old Mrs. E.’s experience; but I could perceive he caught gladly at the idea of deferring the operation a few months longer. I went into the room where Branwell was, to speak to him, about an hour after I got home; it was very forced work to address him. I might have spared myself the trouble, as he took no notice, and made no reply; he was stupefied. My fears were not vain. I hear that he got a sovereign while I have been away, under pretence of paying a pressing debt; he went immediately and changed it at a public-house, and has employed it as was to be expected. - concluded her account by saying he was a‘hopeless being;’ it is too true. In his present state it is scarcely possible to stay in the room where he is. What the future has in store I do not know.”

“March 31, 1846.

“Our poor old servant Tabby had a sort of fit, a fortnight since, but is nearly recovered now. Martha” (the girl they had to assist poor old Tabby, and who remains still the faithful servant at the parsonage) “is ill with a

swelling in her knee, and obliged to go home. I fear it will be long before she is in working condition again. I received the number of the *Record you* sent..... I read D' Aubigné's letter. It is clever, and in what he says about Catholicism very good. The Evangelical Alliance part is not very practicable, yet certainly it is more in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel to preach unity among Christians than to inculcate mutual intolerance and hatred. I am very glad I went to - when I did, for the changed weather has somewhat changed my health and strength since. How do you get on? I long for mild south and west winds. I am thankful papa continues pretty well, though often made very miserable by Branwell's wretched conduct. There—there is no change but for the worse."

Meanwhile the printing of the volume of poems was quietly proceeding. After some consultation and deliberation the sisters had determined to correct the proofs themselves. Up to March 28th the publishers had addressed their correspondent as C. Brontë, Esq., but at this time some "little mistake occurred," and she desired Messrs. Aylott and Co. in future to direct to her real address, "Miss Brontë," &c. But she had evidently left it to be implied that she was not acting on her own behalf, but as agent for the real authors, as in a note, dated April 6, she makes a proposal on behalf of "C., E. and A. Bell," which is to the following effect, that they are preparing for the press a work of fiction, consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales, which may be published either together, as a work of three volumes, of the ordinary novel size, or separately, as single volumes, as may be deemed most advisable. She states in addition, that it is not their intention to publish these tales on their own account; but that the authors direct her to ask Messrs. Aylott and Co. whether they would be disposed to undertake the work, after having, of course, by due inspection of the MS., ascertained that its contents are such as to warrant an expectation of success. To this letter of inquiry the publishers replied speedily, and the tenor of their answer may be gathered from Charlotte's, dated April 11th.

"I beg to thank you, in the name of C., E. and A. Bell, for your obliging offer of advice. I will avail myself of it, to request information on two or

three points. It is evident that unknown authors have great difficulties to contend with, before they can succeed in bringing their works before the public. Can you give me any hint as to the way in which these difficulties are best met? For instance, in the present case, where a work of fiction is in question, in what form would a publisher be most likely to accept the MS.? Whether offered as a work of three vols., or as tales which might be published in numbers, or as contributions to a periodical?

“What publishers would be most likely to receive favourably a proposal of this nature?

“Would it suffice to write to a publisher on the subject, or would it be necessary to have recourse to a personal interview?

“Your opinion and advice on these three points, or on any other which your experience may suggest as important, would be esteemed by us as a favour.”

It is evident from the whole tenor of this correspondence, that the truthfulness and probity of the firm of publishers with whom she had to deal in this her first literary venture, was strongly impressed upon her mind, and was followed by the inevitable consequence of reliance on their suggestions. And the progress of the poems was not unreasonably lengthy or long drawn out. On April 20th she writes to desire that three copies may be sent to her, and that Messrs. Aylott will advise her as to the reviewers to whom copies ought to be sent.

I give the next letter as illustrating the ideas of these girls as to what periodical reviews or notices led public opinion.

“The poems to be neatly done up in cloth. Have the goodness to send copies and advertisements, as early as possible, to each of the undermentioned periodicals.

‘“ Colburn’s New Monthly Magazine.’

‘“Bentley’s Magazine.’

‘“ Hood’s Magazine.’

‘“Jerrold’s Shilling Magazine.’

‘“ Blackwood’s Magazine.’

“‘ The Edinburgh Review.’

“‘ Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine.’

‘“ The Dublin University Magazine.’

“Also to the ‘Daily News’ and to the ’Britannia’ newspapers.

“If there are any other periodicals to which you have been in the habit of sending copies of works, let them be supplied also with copies. I think those I have mentioned will suffice for advertising.”

In compliance with this latter request, Messrs. Aylott suggest that copies and advertisements of the work should be sent to the “Athenæum,” “Literary Gazette,” “Critic,” and “Times;” but in her reply Miss Brontë says, that she thinks the periodicals she first mentioned will be sufficient for advertising in at present, as the authors do not wish to lay out a larger sum than two pounds in advertising, esteeming the success of a work dependent more on the notice it receives from periodicals than on the quantity of advertisements. In case of any notice of the poems appearing, whether favourable or otherwise, Messrs. Aylott and Co. are requested to send her the name and number of those periodicals in which such notices appear, as otherwise, since she has not the opportunity of seeing periodicals regularly, she may miss reading the critique. “Should the poems be remarked upon favourably, it is my intention to appropriate a further sum for advertisements. If, on the other hand, they should pass unnoticed or be condemned, I consider it would be quite useless to advertise, as there is nothing either in the title of the work, or the names of the authors, to attract attention from a single individual.”

I suppose the little volume of poems was published sometime about the end of May, 1846. It stole into life; some weeks passed over, without the mighty murmuring public discovering that three more voices were uttering their speech. And, meanwhile, the course of existence moved drearily along from day to day with the anxious sisters, who must have forgotten their

sense of authorship in the vital care gnawing at their hearts. On June 17, Charlotte writes:—

"Branwell declares that he neither can nor will do any thing for himself; good situations have been offered him, for which, by a fortnight's work, he might have qualified himself, but he will do nothing, except drink and make us all wretched."

In the *Athenæum* of July 4th, under the head of poetry for the million, came a short review of the poems of C., E. and A. Bell. The reviewer assigns to Ellis the highest rank of the three "brothers," as he supposes them to be; he calls Ellis "a fine, quaint spirit;" and speaks of "an evident power of wing that may reach heights not here attempted." Again, with some degree of penetration, the reviewer says, that the poems of Ellis "convey an impression of originality beyond what his contributions to these volumes embody." Currer Bell is placed midway between Ellis and Acton. But there is little in the review to strain out, at this distance of time, as worth preserving. Still, we can fancy with what interest it was read at Haworth Parsonage, and how the sisters would endeavour to find out reasons for opinions, or hints for the future guidance of their talents.

I call particular attention to the following letter of Charlotte's, dated July 10th, 1846. To whom it was written, matters not; but the wholesome sense of duty in it—the sense of the supremacy of that duty which God, in placing us in families, has laid out for us, seems to deserve especial regard in these days.

"I see you are in a dilemma, and one of a peculiar and difficult nature. Two paths lie before you; you conscientiously wish to choose the right one, even though it be the most steep, straight, and rugged; but you do not know which is the right one; you cannot decide whether duty and religion command you to go out into the cold and friendless world, and there to earn your living by governess drudgery, or whether they enjoin your continued stay with your aged mother, neglecting, for the present, every prospect of independency for yourself, and putting up with daily inconvenience,

sometimes even with privations. I can well imagine, that it is next to impossible for you to decide for yourself in this matter, so I will decide it for you. At least, I will tell you what is my earnest conviction on the subject; I will show you candidly how the question strikes me. The right path is that which necessitates the greatest sacrifice of self-interest—which implies the greatest good to others; and this path, steadily followed, will lead, I believe, in time, to prosperity and to happiness; though it may seem, at the outset, to tend quite in a contrary direction. Your mother is both old and infirm; old and infirm people have but few sources of happiness—fewer almost than the comparatively young and healthy can conceive; to deprive them of one of these is cruel. If your mother is more composed when you are with her, stay with her. If she would be unhappy in case you left her, stay with her. It will not apparently, as far as short-sighted humanity can see, be for your advantage to remain at -, nor will you be praised and admired for remaining at home to comfort your mother; yet, probably, your own conscience will approve, and if it does, stay with her. I recommend you to do what I am trying to do myself."

The remainder of this letter is only interesting to the reader as it conveys a peremptory disclaimer of the report that the writer was engaged to be married to her father's curate[3]—the very same gentleman to whom, eight years afterwards, she was united; and who, probably, even now, although she was unconscious of the fact, had begun his service to her, in the same tender and faithful spirit as that in which Jacob served for Rachel. Others may have noticed this, though she did not.

A few more notes remain of her correspondence "on behalf of the Messrs. Bell" with Mr. Aylott. On July 15th she says, "I suppose, as you have not written, no other notices have yet appeared, nor has the demand for the work increased. Will you favour me with a line stating whether any, or how many copies have yet been sold?"

But few, I fear; for, three days later, she wrote the following :-

“The Messrs. Bell desire me to thank you for your suggestion respecting the advertisements. They agree with you that, since the season is unfavourable, advertising had better be deferred. They are obliged to you for the information respecting the number of copies sold.”

On July 23rd she writes to the Messrs. Aylott:—

“The Messrs. Bell would be obliged to you to post the enclosed note in London. It is an answer to the letter you forwarded, which contained an application for their autographs from a person who professed to have read and admired their poems. I think I before intimated, that the Messrs. Bell are desirous for the present of remaining unknown, for which reason they prefer having the note posted in London to sending it direct, in order to avoid giving any clue to residence or identity by post-mark, &c.”

Once more, in September, she writes, “As the work has received no further notice from any periodical, I presume the demand for it has not greatly increased.”

In the biographical notice of her sisters, she thus speaks of the failure of the modest hopes vested in this publication. “The book was printed; it is scarcely known, and all of it that merits to be known are the poems of Ellis Bell. The fixed conviction I held, and hold, of the worth of these poems, has not, indeed, received the confirmation of much favourable criticism; but I must retain it notwithstanding.”

THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË,

AUTHOR OF
"JANE EYRE," "SHIRLEY," "VILLETTE," &c.
BY
E. C. GASKELL,
AUTHOR OF "MARY BARTON," "RUTH," ETC.

"Oh my God,
Thou hast knowledge, only Thou,
How dreary 'tis for women to sit still
On winter nights by solitary fires
And hear the nations praising them far off."

AURORA LEIGH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

During this summer of 1846, while her literary hopes were waning, an anxiety of another kind was increasing. Her father's eyesight had become seriously impaired by the progress of the cataract which was forming. He was nearly blind. He could grope his way about, and recognise the features of those he knew well, when they were placed against a strong light; but he could no longer see to read; and thus his eager appetite for knowledge and information of all kinds was severely balked. He continued to preach. I have heard that he was led up into the pulpit, and that his sermons were never so effective as when he stood there, a grey sightless old man, his blind eyes looking out straight before him, while the words that came from his lips had all the vigour and force of his best days. Another fact has been mentioned to me, curious as showing the accurateness of his sensation of time. His sermons had always lasted exactly half an hour. With the clock right before him, and with his ready flow of words, this had been no difficult matter as long as he could see. But it was the same when he was blind; as the minute-hand came to the point, marking the expiration of the thirty minutes, he concluded his sermon.

Under his great sorrow he was always patient. As in times of far greater affliction, he enforced a quiet endurance of his woe upon himself. But so many interests were quenched by this blindness that he was driven inwards, and must have dwelt much on what was painful and distressing in regard to his only son. No wonder that his spirits gave way, and were depressed. For some time before this autumn, his daughters had been collecting all the information they could respecting the probable success of operations for cataract performed on a person of their father's age. About the end of July, Emily and Charlotte had made a journey to Manchester for the purpose of searching out an operator; and there they heard of the fame of the late Mr. Wilson as an oculist. They went to him at once, but he could not tell, from description, whether the eyes were ready for being operated upon or not. It therefore became necessary for Mr. Brontë to visit him; and towards the end of August, Charlotte brought her father to him. He determined at once to undertake the operation, and recommended them to comfortable lodgings,

kept by an old servant of his. These were in one of numerous similar streets of small monotonous-looking houses, in a suburb of the town. From thence the following letter is dated, on August 21st, 1846:—

"I just scribble a line to you to let you know where I am, in order that you may write to me here, for it seems to me that a letter from you would relieve me from the feeling of strangeness I have in this big town. Papa and I came here on Wednesday; we saw Mr. Wilson, the oculist, the same day; he pronounced papa's eyes quite ready for an operation, and has fixed next Monday for the performance of it. Think of us on that day! We got into our lodgings yesterday. I think we shall be comfortable: at least our rooms are very good, but there is no mistress of the house (she is very ill, and gone out into the country), and I am somewhat puzzled in managing about provisions: we board ourselves. I find myself excessively ignorant. I can't tell what to order in the way of meat. For ourselves I could contrive, papa's diet is so very simple; but there will be a nurse coming in a day or two, and I am afraid of not having things good enough for her. Papa requires nothing you know but plain beef and mutton, tea and bread and butter; but a nurse will probably expect to live much better; give me some hints if you can. Mr. Wilson says we shall have to stay here for a month at least. I wonder how Emily and Anne will get on at home with Branwell. They, too, will have their troubles. What would I not give to have you here! One is forced, step by step, to get experience in the world; but the learning is so disagreeable. One cheerful feature in the business is, that Mr. Wilson thinks most favourably of the case."

"August 26th, 1846.

"The operation is over; it took place yesterday. Mr. Wilson performed it; two other surgeons assisted. Mr. Wilson says, he considers it quite successful; but papa cannot yet see anything. The affair lasted precisely a quarter of an hour; it was not the simple operation of couching Mr. C. described, but the more complicated one of extracting the cataract. Mr. Wilson entirely disapproves of couching. Papa displayed extraordinary patience and firmness; the surgeons seemed surprised. I was in the room all

the time, as it was his wish that I should be there; of course, I neither spoke nor moved till the thing was done, and then I felt that the less I said, either to papa or the surgeons, the better. Papa is now confined to his bed in a dark room, and is not to be stirred for four days; he is to speak and be spoken to as little as possible. I am greatly obliged to you for your letter, and your kind advice, which gave me extreme satisfaction, because I found I had arranged most things in accordance with it, and, as your theory coincides with my practice, I feel assured the latter is right. I hope Mr. Wilson will soon allow me to dispense with the nurse; she is well enough, no doubt, but somewhat too obsequious; and not, I should think, to be much trusted; yet I was obliged to trust her in some things....

"Greatly was I amused by your account of -'s flirtations;[ac] and yet something saddened also. I think Nature intended him for something better than to fritter away his time in making a set of poor, unoccupied spinsters unhappy. The girls, unfortunately, are forced to care for him, and such as him, because, while their minds are mostly unemployed, their sensations are all unworn, and, consequently, fresh and green; and he, on the contrary, has had his fill of pleasure, and can with impunity make a mere pastime of other people's torments. This is an unfair state of things: the match is not equal. I only wish I had the power to infuse into the souls of the persecuted a little of the quiet strength of pride-of the supporting consciousness of superiority (for they are superior to him because purer)—of the fortifying resolve of firmness to bear the present, and wait the end. Could all the virgin population of receive and retain these sentiments, he would continually have to veil his crest before them. Perhaps, luckily, their feelings are not so acute as one would think, and the gentleman's shafts consequently don't wound so deeply as he might desire. I hope it is so."

A few days later, she writes thus: "Papa is still lying in bed, in a dark room, with his eyes bandaged. No inflammation ensued, but still it appears the greatest care, perfect quiet, and utter privation of light are necessary to ensure a good result from the operation. He is very patient, but, of course, depressed and weary. He was allowed to try his sight for the first time yesterday. He could see dimly. Mr. Wilson seemed perfectly satisfied, and said all was right. I have had bad nights from the toothache since I came to Manchester."

All this time, notwithstanding the domestic anxieties which were harassing them—notwithstanding the ill-success of their poems—the three sisters were trying that other literary venture, to which Charlotte made allusion in one of her letters to the Messrs. Aylott. Each of them had written a prose tale, hoping that the three might be published together. “Wuthering Heights” and “Agnes Grey” are before the world. The third-Charlotte’s contribution—is yet in manuscript, but will be published shortly after the appearance of this memoir.[ad] The plot in itself is of no great interest; but it is a poor kind of interest that depends upon startling incidents rather than upon dramatic development of character; and Charlotte Brontë never excelled one or two sketches of portraits which she has given in “The Professor,” nor, in grace of womanhood, ever surpassed one of the female characters there described. By the time she wrote this tale, her taste and judgment had revolted against the exaggerated idealisms of her early girlhood, and she went to the extreme of reality, closely depicting characters as they had shown themselves to her in actual life: if there they were strong even to coarseness,—as was the case with some that she had met with in flesh and blood existence,—she “wrote them down as ass;” if the scenery of such life as she saw was for the most part wild and grotesque, instead of pleasant or picturesque, she described it line for line. The grace of the one or two scenes and characters, which are drawn rather from her own imagination than from absolute fact, stand out in exquisite relief from the deep shadows and wayward lines of others, which call to mind some of the portraits of Rembrandt.

The three tales had tried their fate in vain together, at length they were sent forth separately, and for many months with still-continued ill success. I have mentioned this here, because, among the dispiriting circumstances connected with her anxious visit to Manchester, Charlotte told me that her tale came back upon her hands, curtly rejected by some publisher, on the very day when her father was to submit to his operation. But she had the heart of Robert Bruce within her, and failure upon failure daunted her no more than him. Not only did “The Professor” return again to try his chance among the London publishers, but she began, in this time of care and depressing inquietude, —in those grey, weary, uniform streets, where all faces, save that of her kind doctor, were strange and untouched with

sunlight to her,—there and then, did the brave genius begin “Jane Eyre.” Read what she herself says:—“Currer Bell’s book found acceptance nowhere, nor any acknowledgment of merit, so that something like the chill of despair began to invade his heart.” And, remember, it was not the heart of a person who, disappointed in one hope, can turn with redoubled affection to the many certain blessings that remain. Think of her home, and the black shadow of remorse lying over one in it, till his very brain was mazed, and his gifts and his life were lost;—think of her father’s sight hanging on a thread;—of her sisters’ delicate health, and dependence on her care;—and then admire, as it deserves to be admired, the steady courage which could work away at “Jane Eyre,” all the time “that the one-volume tale was plodding its weary round in London.”

I believe I have already mentioned, that some of her surviving friends consider that an incident which she heard, when at school at Miss Wooler’s, was the germ of the story of Jane Eyre. But of this nothing can be known, except by conjecture. Those to whom she spoke upon the subject of her writings are dead and silent; and the reader may probably have noticed, that in the correspondence from which I have quoted, there has been no allusion whatever to the publication of her poems, nor is there the least hint of the intention of the sisters to publish any tales. I remember, however, many little particulars which Miss Brontë gave me, in answer to my inquiries respecting her mode of composition, &c. She said, that it was not every day that she could write. Sometimes weeks or even months elapsed before she felt that she had anything to add to that portion of her story which was already written. Then, some morning, she would waken up, and the progress of her tale lay clear and bright before her, in distinct vision. When this was the case, all her care was to discharge her household and filial duties, so as to obtain leisure to sit down and write out the incidents and consequent thoughts, which were, in fact, more present to her mind at such times than her actual life itself. Yet notwithstanding this “possession” (as it were), those who survive, of her daily and household companions, are clear in their testimony, that never was the claim of any duty, never was the call of another for help, neglected for an instant. It had become necessary to give Tabby—now nearly eighty years of age-the assistance of a girl. Tabby relinquished any of her work with jealous reluctance, and could not bear to

be reminded, though ever so delicately, that the acuteness of her senses was dulled by age. The other servant might not interfere with what she chose to consider her exclusive work. Among other things, she reserved to herself the right of peeling the potatoes for dinner; but as she was growing blind, she often left in those black specks, which we in the North call the “eyes” of the potato. Miss Brontë was too dainty a housekeeper to put up with this; yet she could not bear to hurt the faithful old servant, by bidding the younger maiden go over the potatoes again, and so reminding Tabby that her work was less effectual than formerly. Accordingly she would steal into the kitchen, and quietly carry off the bowl of vegetables, without Tabby’s being aware, and breaking off in the full flow of interest and inspiration in her writing, carefully cut out the specks in the potatoes, and noiselessly carry them back to their place. This little proceeding may show how orderly and fully she accomplished her duties, even at those times when the “possession” was upon her.

Any one who has studied her writings,—whether in print or in her letters; any one who has enjoyed the rare privilege of listening to her talk, must have noticed her singular felicity in the choice of words. She herself, in writing her books, was solicitous on this point. One set of words was the truthful mirror of her thoughts; no others, however apparently identical in meaning, would do. She had that strong practical regard for the simple holy truth of expression, which Mr. Trench[1] has enforced, as a duty too often neglected. She would wait patiently searching for the right term, until it presented itself to her. It might be provincial, it might be derived from the Latin; so that it accurately represented her idea, she did not mind whence it came; but this care makes her style present the finish of a piece of mosaic. Each component part, however small, has been dropped into the right place. She never wrote down a sentence until she clearly understood what she wanted to say, had deliberately chosen the words, and arranged them in their right order. Hence it comes that, in the scraps of paper covered with her pencil writing which I have seen, there will occasionally be a sentence scored out, but seldom, if ever, a word or an expression. She wrote on these bits of paper in a minute hand, holding each against a piece of board, such as is used in binding books, for a desk. This plan was necessary for one so short-sighted as she was; and, besides, it enabled her to use pencil and

paper, as she sat near the fire in the twilight hours, or if (as was too often the case) she was wakeful for hours in the night. Her finished manuscripts were copied from these pencil scraps, in clear, legible, delicate traced writing, almost as easy to read as print.

The sisters retained the old habit, which was begun in their aunt's life-time, of putting away their work at nine o'clock, and beginning their study, pacing up and down the sitting room. At this time, they talked over the stories they were engaged upon, and described their plots. Once or twice a week, each read to the others what she had written, and heard what they had to say about it. Charlotte told me, that the remarks made had seldom any effect in inducing her to alter her work, so possessed was she with the feeling that she had described reality; but the readings were of great and stirring interest to all, taking them out of the gnawing pressure of daily-recurring cares, and setting them in a free place. It was on one of these occasions, that Charlotte determined to make her heroine plain, small, and unattractive, in defiance of the accepted canon.

The writer of the beautiful obituary article on "the death of Currer Bell,"[2] most likely learnt from herself what is there stated, and which I will take the liberty of quoting, about Jane Eyre.

"She once told her sisters that they were wrong-even morally wrong—in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, 'I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours.' Hence 'Jane Eyre,' said she in telling the anecdote: 'but she is not myself, any further than that.' As the work went on, the interest deepened to the writer. When she came to 'Thornfield' she could not stop. Being short-sighted to excess, she wrote in little square paper-books, held close to her eyes, and (the first copy) in pencil. On she went, writing incessantly for three weeks; by which time she had carried her heroine away from Thornfield, and was herself in a fever which compelled her to pause."

This is all, I believe, which can now be told respecting the conception and composition of this wonderful book, which was, however, only at its

commencement when Miss Brontë returned with her father to Haworth, after their anxious expedition to Manchester.

They arrived at home about the end of September. Mr. Brontë was daily gaining strength, but he was still forbidden to exercise his sight much. Things had gone on more comfortably while she was away than Charlotte had dared to hope, and she expresses herself thankful for the good ensured and the evil spared during her absence.

Soon after this some proposal, of which I have not been able to gain a clear account, was again mooted for Miss Brontë's opening a school at some place distant from Haworth. It elicited the following fragment of a characteristic reply:—

"Leave home!—I shall neither be able to find place nor employment, perhaps, too, I shall be quite past the prime of life, my faculties will be rusted, and my few acquirements in a great measure forgotten. These ideas sting me keenly sometimes; but, whenever I consult my conscience, it affirms that I am doing right in staying at home, and bitter are its upbraidings when I yield to an eager desire for release. I could hardly expect success if I were to err against such warnings. I should like to hear from you again soon. Bring to the point, and make him give you a clear, not a vague, account of what pupils he really could promise; people often think they can do great things in that way till they have tried; but getting pupils is unlike getting any other sort of goods."

Whatever might be the nature and extent of this negotiation, the end of it was that Charlotte adhered to the decision of her conscience, which bade her remain at home, as long as her presence could cheer or comfort those who were in distress, or had the slightest influence over him who was the cause of it. The next extract gives us a glimpse into the cares of that home. It is from a letter dated December 15th.

"I hope you are not frozen up; the cold here is dreadful. I do not remember such a series of North-Pole days. England might really have

taken a slide up into the Arctic Zone; the sky looks like ice; the earth is frozen; the wind is as keen as a two edged blade. We have all had severe colds and coughs in consequence of the weather. Poor Anne has suffered greatly from asthma, but is now, we are glad to say, rather better. She had two nights last week when her cough and difficulty of breathing were painful indeed to hear and witness, and must have been most distressing to suffer; she bore it, as she bears all affliction, without one complaint, only sighing now and then when nearly worn out. She has an extraordinary heroism of endurance. I admire, but I certainly could not imitate her." ... "You say I am to 'tell you plenty.' What would you have me say? Nothing happens at Haworth; nothing, at least, of a pleasant kind. One little incident occurred about a week ago, to sting us to life; but if it gives no more pleasure for you to hear, than it did for us to witness, you will scarcely thank me for adverting to it. It was merely the arrival of a Sheriff 's officer on a visit to B., inviting him either to pay his debts or take a trip to York. Of course his debts had to be paid. It is not agreeable to lose money, time after time, in this way; but where is the use of dwelling on such subjects? It will make him no better."

"December 28th.

"I feel as if it was almost a farce to sit down and write to you now, with nothing to say worth listening to; and, indeed, if it were not for two reasons, I should put off the business at least a fortnight hence. The first reason is, I want another letter from you, for your letters are interesting, they have something in them; some results of experience and observation; one receives them with pleasure, and reads them with relish; and these letters I cannot expect to get, unless I reply to them. I wish the correspondence could be managed so as to be all on one side. The second reason is derived from a remark in your last, that you felt lonely, something as I was at Brussels, and that consequently you had a peculiar desire to hear from old acquaintance. I can understand and sympathize with this. I remember the shortest note was a treat to me, when I was at the above-named place; therefore I write. I have also a third reason: it is a haunting terror lest you should imagine I forget you—that my regard cools with absence. It is not in

my nature to forget your nature; though, I dare say, I should spit fire and explode sometimes, if we lived together continually; and you, too, would get angry, and then we should get reconciled and jog on as before. Do you ever get dissatisfied with your own temper when you are long fixed to one place, in one scene, subject to one monotonous species of annoyance ? I do: I am now in that unenviable frame of mind; my humour, I think, is too soon overthrown, too sore, too demonstrative and vehement. I almost long for some of the uniform serenity you describe in Mrs.—'s disposition; or, at least, I would fain have her power of self-control and concealment; but I would not take her artificial habits and ideas along with her composure. After all, I should prefer being as I am.... You do right not to be annoyed at any maxims of conventionality you meet with. Regard all new ways in the light of fresh experience for you: if you see any honey gather it." ... "I don't, after all, consider that we ought to despise every thing we see in the world, merely because it is not what we are accustomed to. I suspect, on the contrary, that there are not unfrequently substantial reasons underneath for customs that appear to us absurd; and if I were ever again to find myself amongst strangers, I should be solicitous to examine before I condemned. Indiscriminating irony and fault-finding are just sumphishness, and that is all. Anne is now much better, but papa has been for near a fortnight far from well with the influenza; he has at times a most distressing cough, and his spirits are much depressed."

So ended the year 1846.

CHAPTER II.

The next year opened with a spell of cold dreary weather, which told severely on a constitution already tried by anxiety and care. Miss Brontë describes herself as having utterly lost her appetite, and as looking “grey, old, worn and sunk,” from her sufferings during the inclement season. The cold brought on severe toothache; toothache was the cause of a succession of restless miserable nights; and long wakefulness told acutely upon her nerves, making them feel with redoubled sensitiveness all the harass of her oppressive life. Yet she would not allow herself to lay her bad health to the change of an uneasy mind; “for after all,” said she at this time, “I have many, many things to be thankful for.” But the real state of things may be gathered from the following extracts from her letters.

“March 1st.

“Even at the risk of appearing very exacting, I can’t help saying that I should like a letter as long as your last, every time you write. Short notes give one the feeling of a very small piece of a very good thing to eat,—they set the appetite on edge, and don’t satisfy it,—a letter leaves you more contented; and yet, after all, I am very glad to get notes; so don’t think, when you are pinched for time and materials, that it is useless to write a few lines; be assured, a few lines are very acceptable as far as they go; and though I like long letters, I would by no means have you to make a task of writing them ... I really should like you to come to Haworth, before I again go to B -. And it is natural and right that I should have this wish. To keep friendship in proper order, the balance of good offices must be preserved, otherwise a disquieting and anxious feeling creeps in, and destroys mutual comfort. In summer and in fine weather, your visit here might be much better managed than in winter. We could go out more, be more independent of the house and of our room. Branwell has been conducting himself very badly lately. I expect, from the extravagance of his behaviour, and from mysterious hints he drops (for he never will speak out plainly), that we shall be hearing news of fresh debts contracted by him soon. My health is better;

I lay the blame of its feebleness on the cold weather, more than on an uneasy mind.”

“March 24th, 1847.

“It is at Haworth, if all be well, that we must next see each other again. I owe you a grudge for giving Miss M -ae some very exaggerated account about my not being well, and setting her on to urge my leaving home as quite a duty. I’ll take care not to tell you next time, when I think I am looking specially old and ugly; as if people could not have that privilege, without being supposed to be at the last gasp! I shall be thirty-one next birthday. My youth is gone like a dream; and very little use have I ever made of it. What have I done these last thirty years? Precious little.”

The quiet, sad year stole on. The sisters were contemplating near at hand, and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused in the person of that brother, once their fond darling and dearest pride. They had to cheer the poor old father, into whose heart all trial sank the deeper, because of the silent stoicism of his endurance. They had to watch over his health, of which, what ever was its state, he seldom complained. They had to save, as much as they could, the precious remnants of his sight. They had to order the frugal household with increased care, so as to supply wants and expenditure utterly foreign to their self-denying natures. Though they shrank from overmuch contact with their fellow-beings, for all whom they met they had kind words, if few; and when kind actions were needed, they were not spared, if the sisters at the parsonage could render them. They visited the parish schools duly; and often were Charlotte’s rare and brief holidays of a visit from home shortened by her sense of the necessity of being in her place at the Sunday-school.

In the intervals of such a life as this, “Jane Eyre” was making progress. “The Professor” was passing slowly and heavily from publisher to publisher. “Wuthering Heights” and “Agnes Grey” had been accepted by another publisher “on terms somewhat impoverishing to the two authors;” a

bargain to be alluded to more fully hereafter. It was lying in his hands, awaiting his pleasure for its passage through the press, during all the months of early summer.

The piece of external brightness to which the sisters looked during these same summer months, was the hope that the friend to whom so many of Charlotte's letters are addressed, and who was her chosen companion, whenever circumstances permitted them to be together, as well as a favourite with Emily and Anne, would be able to pay them a visit at Haworth. Fine weather had come in May, Charlotte writes, and they hoped to make their visitor decently comfortable. Their brother was tolerably well, having got to the end of a considerable sum of money which he became possessed of in the spring, and therefore under the wholesome restriction of poverty. But Charlotte warns her friend that she must expect to find a change in his appearance, and that he is broken in mind; and ends her note of entreating invitation by saying, "I pray for fine weather, that we may get out while you stay."

At length the day was fixed.

"Friday will suit us very well. I do trust nothing will now arise to prevent your coming. I shall be anxious about the weather on that day; if it rains, I shall cry. Don't expect me to meet you; where would be the good of it? I neither like to meet, nor to be met. Unless, indeed, you had a box or a basket for me to carry; then there would be some sense in it. Come in black, blue, pink, white, or scarlet, as you like. Come shabby or smart; neither the colour nor the condition signifies; provided only the dress contain E -, all will be right."

But there came the first of a series of disappointments to be borne. One feels how sharp it must have been to have wrung out the following words.

"May 20th.

"Your letter of yesterday did indeed give me a cruel chill of disappointment. I cannot blame you, for I know it was not your fault. I do not altogether exempt—af from reproach.... This is bitter, but I feel bitter. As to going to B -, I will not go near the place till you have been to

Haworth. My respects to all and sundry, accompanied with a large amount of wormwood and gall, from the effusion of which you and your mother are alone excepted.—C. B.

"You are quite at liberty to tell what I think, if you judge proper. Though it is true I may be somewhat unjust, for I am deeply annoyed. I thought I had arranged your visit tolerably comfortable for you this time. I may find it more difficult on another occasion."

I must give one sentence from a letter written about this time, as it shows distinctly the clear strong sense of the writer.

"I was amused by what she says respecting her wish that, when she marries, her husband will, at least, have a will of his own, even should he be a tyrant.[ag] Tell her, when she forms that aspiration again, she must make it conditional: if her husband has a strong will, he must also have strong sense, a kind heart, and a thoroughly correct notion of justice; because a man with a weak brain and a strong will, is merely an intractable brute; you can have no hold of him; you can never lead him right. A tyrant under any circumstances is a curse."

Meanwhile, "The Professor" had met with many refusals from different publishers; some, I have reason to believe, not over-courteously worded in writing to an unknown author, and none alleging any distinct reasons for its rejection. Courtesy is always due; but it is, perhaps, hardly to be expected that, in the press of business in a great publishing house, they should find time to explain why they decline particular works. Yet, though one course of action is not to be wondered at, the opposite may fall upon a grieved and disappointed mind with all the graciousness of dew; and I can well sympathize with the published account which "Currer Bell" gives, of the feelings experienced on reading Messrs. Smith and Elder's letter containing the rejection of "The Professor."

"As a forlorn hope, we tried one publishing house more. Ere long, in a much shorter space than that on which experience had taught him to calculate, there came a letter, which he opened in the dreary anticipation of

finding two hard hopeless lines, intimating that ‘Messrs. Smith and Elder were not disposed to publish the MS.,’ and, instead, he took out of the envelope a letter of two pages. He read it trembling. It declined, indeed, to publish that tale, for business reasons, but it discussed its merits and demerits, so courteously, so considerately, in a spirit so rational, with a discrimination so enlightened, that this very refusal cheered the author better than a vulgarly-expressed acceptance would have done. It was added, that a work in three volumes would meet with careful attention.”

Mr. Smith[1] has told me a little circumstance connected with the reception of this manuscript, which seems to me indicative of no ordinary character. It came (accompanied by the note given below) in a brown paper parcel, to 65 Cornhill. Besides the address to Messrs. Smith and Co., there were on it those of other publishers to whom the tale had been sent, not obliterated, but simply scored through, so that Messrs. Smith at once perceived the names of some of the houses in the trade to which the unlucky parcel had gone, without success.

To Messrs. Smith and Elder.

“July l5th, 1847.

“Gentlemen,—I beg to submit to your consideration the accompanying manuscript. I should be glad to learn whether it be such as you approve, and would undertake to publish at as early a period as possible. Address, Mr. Currer Bell, under cover to Miss Brontë, Haworth, Bradford, Yorkshire.”

Some time elapsed before an answer was returned.

A little circumstance may be mentioned here, though it belongs to a somewhat earlier period, as showing Miss Brontë’s inexperience of the ways of the world, and willing deference to the opinion of others. She had written to a publisher about one of her manuscripts, which she had sent him, and, not receiving any reply, she consulted her brother as to what could be the reason for the prolonged silence. He at once set it down to her not

having enclosed a postage-stamp in her letter. She accordingly wrote again, to repair her former omission, and apologise for it.

To Messrs. Smith and Elder.

"August 2nd, 1847.

"Gentlemen,—About three weeks since, I sent for your consideration a MS. entitled 'The Professor, a tale by Currer Bell.' I should be glad to know whether it reached your hands safely, and likewise to learn, at your earliest convenience, whether it be such as you can undertake to publish.—I am, gentlemen, yours respectfully,

"CURRER BELL.

"I enclose a directed cover for your reply."

This time her note met with a prompt answer; for, four days later, she writes (in reply to the letter which she afterwards characterised in the Preface to the second edition of "Wuthering Heights," as containing a refusal so delicate, reasonable, and courteous, as to be more cheering than some acceptances):

"Your objection to the want of varied interest in the tale is, I am aware, not without grounds; yet it appears to me that it might be published without serious risk, if its appearance were speedily followed up by another work from the same pen, of a more striking and exciting character. The first work might serve as an introduction, and accustom the public to the author's name: the success of the second might thereby be rendered more probable. I have a second narrative in three volumes, now in progress, and nearly completed, to which I have endeavoured to impart a more vivid interest than belongs to 'The Professor.' In about a month I hope to finish it, so that if a publisher were found for 'The Professor,' the second narrative might follow as soon as was deemed advisable; and thus the interest of the public (if any interest was aroused) might not be suffered to cool. Will you be kind enough to favour me with your judgment on this plan?"

While the minds of the three sisters were in this state of suspense, their long-expected friend[ah] came to pay her promised visit. She was with them at the beginning of the glowing August of that year. They were out on the moors for the greater part of the day, basking in the golden sunshine, which was bringing on an unusual plenteousness of harvest, for which, somewhat later, Charlotte expressed her earnest desire that there should be a thanksgiving service in all the churches. August was the season of glory for the neighbourhood of Haworth. Even the smoke, lying in the valley between that village and Keighley, took beauty from the radiant colours on the moors above, the rich purple of the heather bloom calling out an harmonious contrast in the tawny golden light that, in the full heat of summer evenings, comes stealing everywhere through the dun atmosphere of the hollows. And up, on the moors, turning away from all habitations of men, the royal ground on which they stood would expand into long swells of amethyst-tinted hills, melting away into aerial tints; and the fresh and fragrant scent of the heather, and the "murmur of innumerable bees," would lend a poignancy to the relish with which they welcomed their friend to their own true home on the wild and open hills.

There, too, they could escape from the Shadow in the house below.

Throughout this time—during all these confidences—not a word was uttered to their friend of the three tales in London; two accepted and in the press—one trembling in the balance of a publisher's judgment; nor did she hear of that other story "nearly completed," lying in manuscript in the grey old parsonage down below. She might have her suspicions that they all wrote with an intention of publication some time; but she knew the bounds which they set to themselves in their communications; nor could she, nor can any one else, wonder at their reticence, when remembering how scheme after scheme had failed, just as it seemed close upon accomplishment.

Mr. Bronte, too, had his suspicions of something going on; but, never being spoken to, he did not speak on the subject, and consequently his ideas were vague and uncertain, only just prophetic enough to keep him from being actually stunned when, later on, he heard of the success of "Jane Eyre;" to the progress of which we must now return.

To Messrs. Smith and Elder.

"August 24th.

"I now send you per rail a MS. entitled 'Jane Eyre,' a novel in three volumes, by Currer Bell. I find I cannot prepay the carriage of the parcel, as money for that purpose is not received at the small station-house where it is left. If, when you acknowledge the receipt of the MS., you would have the goodness to mention the amount charged on delivery, I will immediately transmit it in postage stamps. It is better in future to address Mr. Currer Bell, under cover to Miss Brontë, Haworth, Bradford, Yorkshire, as there is a risk of letters otherwise directed not reaching me at present. To save trouble, I enclose an envelope."

"Jane Eyre" was accepted, and printed and published by October 16th.

While it was in the press, Miss Brontë went to pay a short visit to her friend at B—. The proofs were forwarded to her there, and she occasionally sat at the same table with her friend, correcting them; but they did not exchange a word on the subject.

Immediately on her return to the Parsonage, she wrote:

"September.

"I had a very wet, windy walk home from Keighley; but my fatigue quite disappeared when I reached home, and found all well. Thank God for it.

"My boxes came safe this morning. I have distributed the presents. Papa says I am to remember him most kindly to you. The screen will be very useful, and he thanks you for it. Tabby was charmed with her cap. She said, 'she never thought o' naught o' t' sort as Miss sending her aught, and, she is sure, she can never thank her enough for it.' I was infuriated on finding a jar in my trunk. At first, I hoped it was empty, but when I found it heavy and replete, I could have hurled it all the way back to B—. However, the inscription A. B. softened me much. It was at once kind and villanous in you to send it. You ought first to be tenderly kissed, and then afterwards as tenderly whipped. Emily is just now on the floor of the bedroom where I am writing, looking at her apples. She smiled when I gave the collar to her as

your present, with an expression at once well-pleased and slightly surprised. All send their love.—Yours, in a mixture of anger and love."

When the manuscript of "Jane Eyre" had been received by the future publishers of that remarkable novel, it fell to the share of a gentleman connected with the firm to read it first.[2] He was so powerfully struck by the character of the tale, that he reported his impression in very strong terms to Mr. Smith, who appears to have been much amused by the admiration excited. "You seem to have been so enchanted, that I do not know how to believe you," he laughingly said. But when a second reader, in the person of a clear-headed Scotchman, not given to enthusiasm, had taken the MS. home in the evening, and became so deeply interested in it, as to sit up half the night to finish it, Mr. Smith's curiosity was sufficiently excited to prompt him to read it for himself; and great as were the praises which had been bestowed upon it, he found that they had not exceeded the truth.

On its publication, copies were presented to a few private literary friends. Their discernment had been rightly reckoned upon. They were of considerable standing in the world of letters; and one and all returned expressions of high praise along with their thanks for the book. Among them was the great writer of fiction for whom Miss Brontë felt so strong an admiration,[ai] he immediately appreciated, and, in a characteristic note to the publishers, acknowledged its extraordinary merits.

The Reviews[3] were more tardy, or more cautious. The "Athenæum" and the "Spectator" gave short notices, containing qualified admissions of the power of the author. The "Literary Gazette" was uncertain as to whether it was safe to praise an unknown author. The "Daily News" declined accepting the copy which had been sent, on the score of a rule "never to review novels;" but a little later on, there appeared a notice of the "Bachelor of the Albany," in that paper; and Messrs. Smith and Elder again forwarded a copy of "Jane Eyre" to the Editor, with a request for a notice. This time the work was accepted; but I am not aware what was the character of the article upon it.

The "Examiner" came forward to the rescue, as far as the opinions of professional critics were concerned. The literary articles in that paper were

always remarkable for their genial and generous appreciation of merit; nor was the notice of “Jane Eyre” an exception; it was full of hearty, yet delicate and discriminating praise. Otherwise, the press in general did little to promote the sale of the novel; the demand for it among librarians had begun before the appearance of the review in the “Examiner;” the power and fascination of the tale itself made its merits known to the public, without the kindly finger-posts of professional criticism; and, early in December, the rush began for copies.

I will insert two or three of Miss Brontë’s letters to her publishers, in order to show how timidly the idea of success was received by one so unaccustomed to adopt a sanguine view of any subject in which she was individually concerned. The occasions on which these notes were written, will explain themselves.

Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co.

“Oct. 19th, 1847.

“Gentlemen,—The six copies of ‘Jane Eyre’ reached me this morning. You have given the work every advantage which good paper, clear type, and a seemly outside can supply;—if it fails, the fault will lie with the author,—you are exempt.

“I now await the judgment of the press and the public. I am, Gentlemen, yours respectfully.

“C. BELL.”

Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co.

“Oct. 26th, 1847.

“Gentlemen,—I have received the newspapers. They speak quite as favourably of‘Jane Eyre’ as I expected them to do. The notice in the ‘

Literary Gazette’ seems certainly to have been indited in rather a flat mood, and the ‘Athenæum’ has a style of its own, which I respect, but cannot exactly relish; still when one considers that journals of that standing have a dignity to maintain which would be deranged by a too cordial recognition of the claims of an obscure author, I suppose there is every reason to be satisfied.

“Meantime a brisk sale would be effectual support under the hauteur of lofty critics. I am, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

“C. BELL.”

Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co.

“Nov. 13th, 1847.

“Gentlemen,—I have to acknowledge the receipt of yours of the 11th inst., and to thank you for the information it communicates. The notice from the ‘People’s Journal’ also duly reached me, and this morning I received the ‘Spectator.’ The critique in the ‘Spectator’ gives that view of the book which will naturally be taken by a certain class of minds; I shall expect it to be followed by other notices of a similar nature. The way to detraction has been pointed out, and will probably be pursued. Most future notices will in all likelihood have a reflection of the ‘Spectator’ in them. I fear this turn of opinion will not improve the demand for the book—but time will show. If ‘Jane Eyre’ has any solid worth in it, it ought to weather a gust of unfavourable wind. I am, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

“C. BELL.”

Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co.

“Nov. 30th, 1847.

“Gentlemen,—I have received the ‘Economist,’ but not the ‘Examiner;’ from some cause that paper has missed, as the ‘Spectator’ did on a former occasion; I am glad, however, to learn through your letter, that its notice of ‘Jane Eyre’ was favourable, and also that the prospects of the work appear to improve.

“I am obliged to you for the information respecting ‘Wuthering Heights.’ I am, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

“C. BELL.”

To Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co.

“Dec. 1st, 1847.

“Gentlemen,—The ‘Examiner’ reached me to-day; it had been missent on account of the direction, which was to Currer Bell, care of Miss Brontë. Allow me to intimate that it would be better in future not to put the name of Currer Bell on the outside of communications; if directed simply to Miss Brontë they will be more likely to reach their destination safely. Currer Bell is not known in the district, and I have no wish that he should become known. The notice in the ‘Examiner’ gratified me very much; it appears to be from the pen of an able man who has understood what he undertakes to criticise; of course, approbation from such a quarter is encouraging to an author, and I trust it will prove beneficial to the work. I am, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

“C. BELL.”

“I received likewise seven other notices from provincial papers enclosed in an envelope. I thank you very sincerely for so punctually sending me all the various criticisms on ‘Jane Eyre.’ ”

To Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co.

“Dec. 10th, 1847.

“Gentlemen,—I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter inclosing a bank post bill, for which I thank you. Having already expressed my sense of your kind and upright conduct, I can now only say that I trust you will always have reason to be as well content with me as I am with you. If the result of any future exertions I may be able to make should prove agreeable and advantageous to you, I shall be well satisfied; and it would be a serious source of regret to me if I thought you ever had reason to repent being my publishers.

“You need not apologise, Gentlemen, for having written to me so seldom; of course I am always glad to hear from you, but I am truly glad to hear from Mr. Williams likewise; he was my first favourable critic; he first gave me encouragement to persevere as an author, consequently I naturally respect him and feel grateful to him.

“Excuse the informality of my letter, and believe me, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

“CURRER BELL.”

There is little record remaining of the manner in which the first news of its wonderful success reached and affected the one heart of the three sisters. I once asked Charlotte—we were talking about the description of Lowood school, and she was saying that she was not sure whether she should have written it, if she had been aware how instantaneously it would have been identified with Cowan Bridge—whether the popularity to which the novel attained had taken her by surprise. She hesitated a little, and then said: “I believed that what had impressed me so forcibly when I wrote it, must make a strong impression on any one who read it. I was not surprised at those who read ‘Jane Eyre’ being deeply interested in it; but I hardly expected that a book by an unknown author could find readers.”

The sisters had kept the knowledge of their literary ventures from their father, fearing to increase their own anxieties and disappointment by witnessing his; for he took an acute interest in all that befell his children,

and his own tendency had been towards literature in the days when he was young and hopeful. It was true he did not much manifest his feelings in words; he would have thought that he was prepared for disappointment as the lot of man, and that he could have met it with stoicism; but words are poor and tardy interpreters of feelings to those who love one another, and his daughters knew how he would have borne ill-success worse for them than for himself. So they did not tell him what they were undertaking. He says now that he suspected it all along, but his suspicions could take no exact form, as all he was certain of was, that his children were perpetually writing—and not writing letters. We have seen how the communications from their publishers were received "under cover to Miss Brontë." Once, Charlotte told me, they overheard the postman meeting Mr. Brontë, as the latter was leaving the house, and inquiring from the parson where one Currer Bell could be living, to which Mr. Brontë replied that there was no such person in the parish. This must have been the misadventure to which Miss Brontë alludes in the beginning of her correspondence with Mr. Aylott.

Now, however, when the demand for the work had assured success to "Jane Eyre," her sisters urged Charlotte to tell their father of its publication. She accordingly went into his study one afternoon after his early dinner, carrying with her a copy of the book, and one or two reviews, taking care to include a notice adverse to it.

She informed me that something like the following conversation took place between her and him. (I wrote down her words the day after I heard them; and I am pretty sure they are accurate.)

"Papa, I've been writing a book."

"Have you, my dear?"

"Yes, and I want you to read it."

"I am afraid it will try my eyes too much."

"But it is not in manuscript: it is printed."

"My dear! you've never thought of the expense it will be! It will be almost sure to be a loss, for how can you get a book sold? No one knows you or your name."

“But, papa, I don’t think it will be a loss; no more will you, if you will let me read you a review or two, and tell you more about it.”

So she sate down and read some of the reviews to her father; and then, giving him the copy of “Jane Eyre” that she intended for him, she left him to read it. When he came in to tea, he said, “Girls, do you know Charlotte has been writing a book, and it is much better than likely?”

But while the existence of Currer Bell, the author, was like a piece of a dream to the quiet inhabitants of Haworth Parsonage, who went on with their uniform household life,—their cares for their brother being its only variety,—the whole reading-world of England was in a ferment to discover the unknown author. Even the publishers of “Jane Eyre” were ignorant whether Currer Bell was a real or an assumed name,—whether it belonged to a man or a woman. In every town people sought out the list of their friends and acquaintances, and turned away in disappointment. No one they knew had genius enough to be the author. Every little incident mentioned in the book was turned this way and that to answer, if possible, the much-vexed question of sex. All in vain. People were content to relax their exertions to satisfy their curiosity, and simply to sit down and greatly admire.

I am not going to write an analysis of a book with which every one who reads this biography is sure to be acquainted; much less a criticism upon a work, which the great flood of public opinion has lifted up from the obscurity in which it first appeared, and laid high and safe on the everlasting hills of fame.

Before me lies a packet of extracts from newspapers and periodicals, which Mr. Brontë has sent me. It is touching to look them over, and see how there is hardly any notice, however short and clumsily-worded, in any obscure provincial paper, but what has been cut out and carefully ticketed with its date by the poor, bereaved father,—so proud when he first read them—so desolate now. For one and all are full of praise of this great, unknown genius, which suddenly appeared amongst us. Conjecture as to the authorship ran about like wild-fire. People in London, smooth and polished as the Athenians of old, and like them “spending their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing,” were astonished and delighted

to find that a fresh sensation, a new pleasure, was in reserve for them in the uprising of an author capable of depicting with accurate and Titanic power the strong, self-reliant, racy, and individual characters which were not, after all, extinct species, but lingered still in existence in the North. They thought that there was some exaggeration mixed with the peculiar force of delineation. Those nearer to the spot, where the scene of the story was apparently laid, were sure, from the very truth and accuracy of the writing, that the writer was no Southeron; for though "dark, and cold, and rugged is the North," the old strength of the Scandinavian races yet abides there, and glowed out in every character depicted in "Jane Eyre." Farther than this, curiosity, both honourable and dishonourable, was at fault.

When the second edition appeared, in the January of the following year, with the dedication to Mr. Thackeray, people looked at each other, and wondered afresh. But Currer Bell knew no more of William Makepeace Thackeray, as an individual man—of his life, age, fortunes or circumstances —than she did of those of Mr. Michael Angelo Titmarsh.[aj] The one had placed his name as author upon the title-page of "Vanity Fair," the other had not. She was thankful for the opportunity of expressing her high admiration of a writer, whom, as she says, she regarded "as the social regenerator of his day—as the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped state of things..... His wit is bright, his humour attractive, but both bear the same relation to his serious genius, that the mere lambent sheet-lightning, playing under the edge of the summer cloud, does to the electric death-spark hid in its womb."

Anne Brontë had been more than usually delicate all the summer, and her sensitive spirit had been deeply affected by the great anxiety of her home. But now that "Jane Eyre" gave such indications of success, Charlotte began to plan schemes of future pleasure,—perhaps relaxation from care, would be the more correct expression,—for their darling younger sister, the "little one" of the household. But, although Anne was cheered for a time by Charlotte's success, the fact was, that neither her spirits nor her bodily strength were such as to incline her to much active exertion, and she led far too sedentary a life, continually stooping, either over her book, or work, or at her desk. "It is with difficulty," writes her sister, "that we can prevail upon her to take a walk, or induce her to converse. I look forward to next

summer with the confident intention that she shall, if possible, make at least a brief sojourn at the sea-side." In this same letter, is a sentence, telling how dearly home, even with its present terrible drawback, lay at the roots of her heart; but it is too much blended with reference to the affairs of others, to bear quotation.

Any author of a successful novel is liable to an inroad of letters from unknown readers, containing commendation—sometimes of so fulsome and indiscriminating a character, as to remind the recipient of Dr. Johnson's famous speech to one who offered presumptuous and injudicious praise[4]—sometimes saying merely a few words, which have power to stir the heart "as with the sound of a trumpet," and in the high humility they excite, to call forth strong resolutions to make all future efforts worthy of such praise; and occasionally containing that true appreciation of both merits and demerits, together with the sources of each, which forms the very criticism and help for which an inexperienced writer thirsts. Of each of these kinds of communication, Currer Bell received her full share; and her warm heart, and true sense and high standard of what she aimed at, affixed to each its true value. Among other letters of hers, some to Mr. G. H. Lewes[5] have been kindly placed by him at my service; and as I know Miss Brontë highly prized his letters of encouragement and advice, I shall give extracts from her replies, as their dates occur, because they will indicate the kind of criticism she valued, and also because throughout, in anger, as in agreement and harmony, they show her character, unblinded by any self-flattery, full of clear-sighted modesty as to what she really did well, and what she failed in, grateful for friendly interest, and only sore and irritable when the question of sex in authorship was, as she thought, roughly or unfairly treated. As to the rest, the letters speak for themselves, to those who know how to listen, far better than I can interpret their meaning into my poorer and weaker words. Mr. Lewes has politely sent me the following explanation of that letter of his, to which the succeeding one of Miss Brontë is a reply.

"When 'Jane Eyre' first appeared, the publishers courteously sent me a copy The enthusiasm with which I read it, made me go down to Mr. Parker, and propose to write a review of it for 'Frazer's Magazine.' He would not

consent to an unknown novel—for the papers had not yet declared themselves—receiving such importance, but thought it might make one on *Recent Novels: English* and French—which appeared in *Frazer, December,* 1847. Meanwhile I had written to Miss Brontë to tell her the delight with which her book filled me; and seemed to have ‘sermonized’ her, to judge from her reply.”

To G. H. Lewes, Esq.

“Nov. 6th, 1847.

“Dear Sir,—Your letter reached me yesterday; I beg to assure you, that I appreciate fully the intention with which it was written, and I thank you sincerely, both for its cheering commendation and valuable advice.

“You warn me to beware of melodrama, and you exhort me to adhere to the real. When I first began to write, so impressed was I with the truth of the principles you advocate, that I determined to take Nature and Truth as my sole guides, and to follow in their very footprints; I restrained imagination, eschewed romance, repressed excitement; over-bright colouring, too, I avoided, and sought to produce something which should be soft, grave, and true.

“My work (a tale in one volume) being completed, I offered it to a publisher. He said it was original, faithful to nature, but he did not feel warranted in accepting it; such a work would not sell. I tried six publishers in succession; they all told me it was deficient in ‘startling incident’ and ‘thrilling excitement,’ that it would never suit the circulating libraries, and, as it was on those libraries the success of works of fiction mainly depended, they could not undertake to publish what would be overlooked there.

“ ‘Jane Eyre’ was rather objected to at first, on the same grounds, but finally found acceptance.

“I mention this to you, not with a view of pleading exemption from censure, but in order to direct your attention to the root of certain literary evils. If, in your forthcoming article in ‘Frazer,’ you would bestow a few

words of enlightenment on the public who support the circulating libraries, you might, with your powers, do some good.

“You advise me, too, not to stray far from the ground of experience, as I become weak when I enter the region of fiction; and you say, ‘real experience is perennially interesting, and to all men.’

“I feel that this also is true; but, dear Sir, is not the real experience of each individual very limited? And, if a writer dwells upon that solely or principally, is he not in danger of repeating himself, and also of becoming an egotist? Then, too, imagination is a strong, restless faculty, which claims to be heard and exercised: are we to be quite deaf to her cry, and insensate to her struggles? When she shows us bright pictures, are we never to look at them and try to reproduce them? And when she is eloquent, and speaks rapidly and urgently in our ear, are we not to write to her dictation?

“I shall anxiously search the next number of ‘Frazer’ for your opinions on these points.—Believe me, dear Sir, yours gratefully,

“C. BELL.”

But while gratified by appreciation as an author, she was cautious as to the person from whom she received it, for much of the value of the praise depended on the sincerity and capability of the person rendering it. Accordingly, she applied to Mr. Williams (a gentleman connected with her publisher’s firm) for information as to who and what Mr. Lewes was. Her reply, after she had learnt something of the character of her future critic, and while awaiting his criticism, must not be omitted. Besides the reference to him, it contains some amusing allusions to the perplexity which began to be excited respecting the “identity of the brothers Bell,” and some notice of the conduct of another publisher towards her sister, which I refrain from characterising, because I understand that truth is considered a libel in speaking of such people.[6]

To W. S. Williams, Esq.

“Nov. 10th, 1847.

“Dear Sir,—I have received the ‘Britannia’ and the ‘Sun,’ but not the ‘Spectator,’ which I rather regret, as censure, though not pleasant, is often wholesome.

“Thank you for your information regarding Mr. Lewes. I am glad to hear that he is a clever and sincere man: such being the case, I can await his critical sentence with fortitude; even if it goes against me, I shall not murmur; ability and honesty have a right to condemn, where they think condemnation is deserved. From what you say, however, I trust rather to obtain at least a modified approval.

“Your account of the various surmises respecting the identity of the brothers Bell, amused me much: were the enigma solved, it would probably be found not worth the trouble of solution; but I will let it alone; it suits ourselves to remain quiet, and certainly injures no one else.

“The reviewer who noticed the little book of poems, in the ‘Dublin Magazine,’ conjectured that the soi-disant three personages were in reality but one, who, endowed with an unduly prominent organ of self-esteem, and consequently impressed with a somewhat weighty notion of his own merits, thought them too vast to be concentrated in a single individual, and accordingly divided himself into three, out of consideration, I suppose, for the nerves of the much-to-be-astounded public! This was an ingenious thought in the reviewer,—very original and striking, but not accurate. We are three.

“A prose work, by Ellis and Acton, will soon appear: it should have been out, indeed, long since; for the first proof-sheets were already in the press at the commencement of last August, before Currer Bell had placed the MS. of ‘Jane Eyre’ in your hands. Mr.—, however, does not do business like Messrs. Smith and Elder; a different spirit seems to preside at—Street, to that which guides the helm at 65, Cornhill. . . . . My relations have suffered from exhausting delay and procrastination, while I have to acknowledge the benefits of a management at once business-like and gentlemanlike, energetic and considerate.

“I should like to know if Mr.—ak often acts as he has done to my relations, or whether this is an exceptional instance of his method. Do you know, and can you tell me anything about him? You must excuse me for

going to the point at once, when I want to learn anything: if my questions are importunate, you are, of course, at liberty to decline answering them.—I am, yours respectfully,

"C. BELL."

To G. H. *Lewes, Esq.*

"Nov. 22nd, 1847.

"Dear Sir,—I have now read 'Ranthorpe.'[al] I could not get it till a day or two ago; but I have got it and read it at last; and in reading 'Ranthorpe,' I have read a new book,—not a reprint—not a reflection of any other book, but a new book.

"I did not know such books were written now. It is very different to any of the popular works of fiction; it fills the mind with fresh knowledge. Your experience and your convictions are made the reader's and to an author, at least, they have a value and an interest quite unusual. I await your criticism on 'Jane Eyre' now with other sentiments than I entertained before the perusal of 'Ranthorpe.'

"You were a stranger to me. I did not particularly respect you. I did not feel that your praise or blame would have any special weight. I knew little of your right to condemn or approve. *Now* I am informed on these points.

"You will be severe; your last letter taught me as much. Well! I shall try to extract good out of your severity: and besides, though I am now sure you are a just, discriminating man, yet, being mortal, you must be fallible; and if any part of your censure galls me too keenly to the quick—gives me deadly pain—I shall for the present disbelieve it, and put it quite aside, till such time as I feel able to receive it without torture.—I am, dear Sir, yours very respectfully,

"C. BELL."

In December, 1847, “Wuthering Heights” and “Agnes Grey” appeared. The first-named of these stories has revolted many readers by the power with which wicked and exceptional characters are depicted. Others, again, have felt the attraction of remarkable genius, even when displayed on grim and terrible criminals. Miss Brontë herself says, with regard to this tale, “Where delineation of human character is concerned, the case is different. I am bound to avow that she had scarcely more practical knowledge of the peasantry amongst whom she lived, than a nun has of the country-people that pass her convent gates. My sister’s disposition was not naturally gregarious: circumstances favoured and fostered her tendency to seclusion; except to go to church, or take a walk on the hills, she rarely crossed the threshold of home. Though the feeling for the people around her was benevolent, intercourse with them she never sought, nor, with very few exceptions, ever experienced; and yet she knew them, knew their ways, their language, and their family histories; she could hear of them with interest, and talk of them with detail minute, graphic, and accurate; but with them she rarely exchanged a word. Hence it ensued, that what her mind has gathered of the real concerning them, was too exclusively confined to those tragic and terrible traits, of which, in listening to the secret annals of every rude vicinage, the memory is sometimes compelled to receive the impress. Her imagination, which was a spirit more sombre than sunny—more powerful than sportive—found in such traits material whence it wrought creations like Heathcliffe, like Earnshaw, like Catharine. Having formed these beings, she did not know what she had done. If the auditor of her work, when read in manuscript, shuddered under the grinding influence of natures so relentless and implacable—of spirits so lost and fallen; if it was complained that the mere hearing of certain vivid and fearful scenes banished sleep by night, and disturbed mental peace by day, Ellis Bell would wonder what was meant, and suspect the complainant of affectation. Had she but lived, her mind would of itself have grown like a strong tree—loftier, straighter, wider-spreading-and its matured fruits would have attained a mellower ripeness and sunnier bloom; but on that mind time and experience alone could work; to the influence of other intellects she was not amenable.”

Whether justly or unjustly, the productions of the two younger Miss Brontës were not received with much favour at the time of their publication. “Critics failed to do them justice. The immature, but very real, powers revealed in ‘Wuthering Heights,’ were scarcely recognized; its import and nature were misunderstood; the identity of its author was misrepresented: it was said that this was an earlier and ruder attempt of the same pen which had produced ‘Jane Eyre.’ ” . . . . “Unjust and grievous error! We laughed at it at first, but I deeply lament it now.”

Henceforward Charlotte Brontë’s existence becomes divided into two parallel currents—her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Brontë, the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each character—not opposing each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled. When a man becomes an author, it is probably merely a change of employment to him. He takes a portion of that time which has hitherto been devoted to some other study or pursuit; he gives up something of the legal or medical profession, in which he has hitherto endeavoured to serve others, or relinquishes part of the trade or business by which he has been striving to gain a livelihood; and another merchant, or lawyer, or doctor, steps into his vacant place, and probably does as well as he. But no other can take up the quiet, regular duties of the daughter, the wife, or the mother, as well as she whom God has appointed to fill that particular place: a woman’s principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice; nor can she drop the domestic charges devolving on her as an individual, for the exercise of the most splendid talents that were ever bestowed. And yet she must not shrink from the extra responsibility implied by the very fact of her possessing such talents. She must not hide her gift in a napkin; it was meant for the use and service of others. In an humble and faithful spirit must she labor to do what is not impossible, or God would not have set her to do it.

I put into words what Charlotte Brontë put into actions.

The year 1848 opened with sad domestic distress. It is necessary, however painful, to remind the reader constantly of what was always present to the hearts of father and sisters at this time. It is well that the thoughtless critics, who spoke of the sad and gloomy views of life presented by the Brontës in their tales, should know how such words were wrung out of them by the living recollection of the long agony they suffered. It is well, too, that they

who have objected to the representation of coarseness and shrank from it with repugnance, as if such conceptions arose out of the writers, should learn, that, not from the imagination—not from internal conception—but from the hard cruel facts, pressed down, by external life, upon their very senses, for long months and years together, did they write out what they saw, obeying the stern dictates of their consciences. They might be mistaken. They might err in writing at all, when their afflictions were so great that they could not write otherwise than they did of life. It is possible that it would have been better to have described only good and pleasant people, doing only good and pleasant things (in which case they could hardly have written at any time): all I say is, that never, I believe, did women, possessed of such wonderful gifts, exercise them with a fuller feeling of responsibility for their use. As to mistakes, they stand now—as authors as well as women—before the judgment-seat of God.

"Jan. 11th, 1848.

"We have not been very comfortable here at home lately. Branwell has, by some means, contrived to get more money from the old quarter, and has led us a sad life.... Papa is harassed day and night; we have little peace; he is always sick; has two or three times fallen down in fits; what will be the ultimate end, God knows. But who is without their drawback, their scourge, their skeleton behind the curtain? It remains only to do one's best, and endure with patience what God sends."

I suppose that she had read Mr. Lewes' review on "Recent Novels," when it appeared in the December of the last year, but I find no allusion to it till she writes to him on January 12th, 1848.

"Dear Sir,—I thank you then sincerely for your generous review; and it is with the sense of double content I express my gratitude, because I am now sure the tribute is not superfluous or obtrusive. You were not severe on 'Jane Eyre;' you were very lenient. I am glad you told me my faults plainly

in private, for in your public notice you touch on them so lightly, I should perhaps have passed them over, thus indicated, with too little reflection.

“I mean to observe your warning about being careful how I undertake new works; my stock of materials is not abundant, but very slender; and, besides, neither my experience, my acquirements, nor my powers, are sufficiently varied to justify my ever becoming a frequent writer. I tell you this, because your article in ‘Frazer’ left in me an uneasy impression that you were disposed to think better of the author of ‘Jane Eyre’ than that individual deserved; and I would rather you had a correct than a flattering opinion of me, even though I should never see you.

“If I ever do write another book, I think I will have nothing of what you call ‘melodrama;’ I think so, but I am not sure. I think, too, I will endeavour to follow the counsel which shines out of Miss Austen’s ‘mild eyes,’ ‘to finish more and be more subdued;’ but neither am I sure of that. When authors write best, or, at least, when they write most fluently, an influence seems to waken in them, which becomes their master—which will have its own way—putting out of view all behests but its own, dictating certain words, and insisting on their being used, whether vehement or measured in their nature; new-moulding characters, giving unthought of turns to incidents, rejecting carefully-elaborated old ideas, and suddenly creating and adopting new ones.

“Is it not so? And should we try to counteract this influence? Can we indeed counteract it?

“I am glad that another work of yours will soon appear; most curious shall I be to see whether you will write up to your own principles, and work out your own theories. You did not do it altogether in ‘Ranthorpe’—at least not in the latter part; but the first portion was, I think, nearly without fault; then it had a pith, truth, significance in it, which gave the book sterling value; but to write so, one must have seen and known a great deal, and I have seen and known very little.

“Why do you like Miss Austen so very much? I am puzzled on that point. What induced you to say that you would have rather written ‘Pride and Prejudice,’ or ‘Tom Jones,’ than any of the Waverley Novels?

“I had not seen ‘Pride and Prejudice’ till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate, daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully-fenced, high-cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses. These observations will probably irritate you, but I shall run the risk.

“Now I can understand admiration of George Sand;[7] for though I never saw any of her works which I admired throughout (even ‘Consuelo,’ which is the best, or the best that I have read, appears to me to couple strange extravagance with wondrous excellence), yet she has a grasp of mind, which, if I cannot fully comprehend, I can very deeply respect; she is sagacious and profound;—Miss Austen is only shrewd and observant.

“Am I wrong—or, were you hasty in what you said? If you have time, I should be glad to hear further on this subject; if not, or if you think the questions frivolous, do not trouble yourself to reply.

I am, yours respectfully,

“C. BELL.”

To G. H. Lewes, Esq.

“Jan. 18th, 1848.

“Dear Sir,—I must write one more note, though I had not intended to trouble you again so soon. I have to agree with you, and to differ from you.

“You correct my crude remarks on the subject of the ‘influence’; well, I accept your definition of what the effects of that influence should be; I recognise the wisdom of your rules for its regulation.....

“What a strange lecture comes next in your letter! You say I must familiarise my mind with the fact, that ‘Miss Austen is not a poetess, has no “sentiment” (you scornfully enclose the word in inverted commas), no

eloquence, none of the ravishing enthusiasm of poetry,'—and then you add, I must 'learn to acknowledge her as *one of the greatest artists, of the greatest painters of human character,* and one of the writers with the nicest sense of means to an end that ever lived."

"The last point only will I ever acknowledge. "Can there be a great artist without poetry? "What I call—what I will bend to, as a great artist then—cannot be destitute of the divine gift. But by poetry, I am sure, you understand something different to what I do, as you do by 'sentiment.' It is *poetry,* as I comprehend the word, which elevates that masculine George Sand, and makes out of something coarse, something Godlike. It is 'sentiment,' in my sense of the term—sentiment jealously hidden, but genuine, which extracts the venom from that formidable Thackeray, and converts what might be corrosive poison into purifying elixir.

"If Thackeray did not cherish in his large heart deep feeling for his kind, he would delight to exterminate; as it is, I believe, he wishes only to reform. Miss Austen being, as you say, without 'sentiment,' without poetry, maybe is sensible, real (more real than true), but she cannot be great.

"I submit to your anger, which I have now excited (for have I not questioned the perfection of your darling?); the storm may pass over me. Nevertheless, I will when I can (I do not know when that will be, as I have no access to a circulating library), diligently peruse all Miss Austen's works, as you recommend..... You must forgive me for not always being able to think as you do, and still believe me, yours gratefully,

"C. BELL."

I have hesitated a little, before inserting the following extract from a letter to Mr. Williams, but it is strikingly characteristic; and the criticism contained in it is, from that circumstance, so interesting (whether we agree with it or not), that I have determined to do so, though I thereby displace the chronological order of the letters, in order to complete this portion of a correspondence which is very valuable, as showing the purely intellectual side of her character.

To W S. Williams, Esq.

"April 26th, 1848.

"My dear Sir,—I have now read, 'Rose, Blanche, and Violet,'am and I will tell you, as well as I can, what I think of it. Whether it is an improvement on 'Ranthorpe' I do not know, for I liked 'Ranthorpe' much; but, at any rate, it contains more of a good thing. I find in it the same power, but more fully developed.

"The author's character is seen in every page, which makes the book interesting—far more interesting than any story could do; but it is what the writer himself says that attracts, far more than what he puts into the mouths of his characters. G. H. Lewes is, to my perception, decidedly the most original character in the book..... The didactic passages seem to me the best—far the best—in the work; very acute, very profound, are some of the views there given, and very clearly they are offered to the reader. He is a just thinker; he is a sagacious observer; there is wisdom in his theory, and, I doubt not, energy in his practice. But why, then, are you often provoked with him while you read? How does he manage, while teaching, to make his hearer feel as if his business was, not quietly to receive the doctrines propounded, but to combat them? You acknowledge that he offers you gems of pure truth; why do you keep perpetually scrutinising them for flaws?

"Mr. Lewes, I divine, with all his talents and honesty, must have some faults of manner; there must be a touch too much of dogmatism; a dash extra of confidence in him, sometimes. This you think while you are reading the book; but when you have closed it and laid it down, and sat a few minutes collecting your thoughts, and settling your impressions, you find the idea or feeling predominant in your mind to be pleasure at the fuller acquaintance you have made with a fine mind and a true heart, with high abilities and manly principles. I hope he will not be long ere he publishes another book. His emotional scenes are somewhat too uniformly vehement: would not a more subdued style of treatment often have produced a more masterly effect? Now and then Mr. Lewes takes a French pen into his hand, wherein he differs from Mr. Thackeray, who always uses an English quill. However, the French pen does not far mislead Mr. Lewes; he wields it with

British muscles. All honour to him for the excellent general tendency of his book!

"He gives no charming picture of London literary society, and especially the female part of it; but all coteries, whether they be literary, scientific, political, or religious, must, it seems to me, have a tendency to change truth into affectation. When people belong to a clique, they must, I suppose, in some measure, write, talk, think, and live for that clique; a harassing and narrowing necessity. I trust, the press and the public show themselves disposed to give the book the reception it merits; and that is a very cordial one, far beyond anything due to a Bulwer or D'Israeli production."[8]

Let us return from Currer Bell to Charlotte Brontë. The winter in Haworth had been a sickly season. Influenza had prevailed amongst the villagers, and where there was a real need for the presence of the clergyman's daughters, they were never found wanting, although they were shy of bestowing mere social visits on the parishioners. They had themselves suffered from the epidemic; Anne severely, as in her case it had been attended with cough and fever enough to make her elder sisters very anxious about her.

There is no doubt that the proximity of the crowded churchyard rendered the Parsonage unhealthy, and occasioned much illness to its inmates. Mr. Brontë represented the unsanitary state of Haworth pretty forcibly to the Board of Health; and, after the requisite visits from their officers, obtained a recommendation that all future interments in the churchyard should be forbidden, a new graveyard opened on the hill-side, and means set on foot for obtaining a water-supply to each house,[9] instead of the weary, hard-worked housewives having to carry every bucketful from a distance of several hundred yards up a steep street. But he was baffled by the rate-payers; as, in many a similar instance, quantity carried it against quality, numbers against intelligence. And thus we find that illness often assumed a low typhoid form in Haworth, and fevers of various kinds visited the place with sad frequency.

In February, 1848, Louis Philippe was dethroned. The quick succession of events at that time called forth the following expression of Miss Brontë's

thoughts on the subject, in a letter addressed to Miss Wooler, and dated March 31st.

"I remember well wishing my lot had been cast in the troubled times of the late war, and seeing in its exciting incidents a kind of stimulating charm, which it made my pulses beat fast to think of: I remember even, I think, being a little impatient, that you would not fully sympathise with my feelings on those subjects; that you heard my aspirations and speculations very tranquilly, and by no means seemed to think the flaming swords could be any pleasant addition to Paradise. I have now outlived youth; and, though I dare not say that I have outlived all its illusions—that the romance is quite gone from life—the veil fallen from truth, and that I see both in naked reality—yet, certainly, many things are not what they were ten years ago; and, amongst the rest, 'the pomp and circumstance of war' have quite lost in my eyes their fictitious glitter. I have still no doubt that the shock of moral earthquakes wakens a vivid sense of life, both in nations and individuals; that the fear of dangers on a broad national scale, diverts men's minds momentarily from brooding over small private perils, and for the time gives them something like largeness of views; but, as little doubt have I, that convulsive revolutions put back the world in all that is good, check civilisation, bring the dregs of society to its surface; in short, it appears to me that insurrections and battles are the acute diseases of nations, and that their tendency is to exhaust, by their violence, the vital energies of the countries where they occur. That England may be spared the spasms, cramps, and frenzy-fits now contorting the Continent, and threatening Ireland, I earnestly pray.[10] With the French and Irish I have no sympathy. With the Germans and Italians I think the case is different; as different as the love of freedom is from the lust for license."

Her birthday came round. She wrote to the friend whose birthday was within a week of hers; wrote the accustomed letter; but, reading it with our knowledge of what she had done, we perceived the difference between her thoughts and what they were a year or two ago, when she said "I have done nothing." There must have been a modest consciousness of having "done something" present in her mind, as she wrote this year:—

“I am now thirty-two. Youth is gone—gone,—and will never come back: can’t help it . . . It seems to me, that sorrow must come some time to everybody, and those who scarcely taste it in their youth, often have a more brimming and bitter cup to drain in after life; whereas, those who exhaust the dregs early, who drink the lees before the wine, may reasonably hope for more palatable draughts to succeed.”

The authorship of “Jane Eyre” was as yet a close secret in the Brontë family; not even this friend, who was all but a sister, knew more about it than the rest of the world. She might conjecture, it is true, both from her knowledge of previous habits, and from the suspicious fact of the proofs having been corrected at B—, that some literary project was afoot; but she knew nothing, and wisely said nothing, until she heard a report from others, that Charlotte Brontë was an author—had published a novel! Then she wrote to her; and received the two following letters; confirmatory enough, as it seems to me now, in their very vehemence and agitation of intended denial, of the truth of the report.

“April 28th, 1848.

“Write another letter, and explain that last note of yours distinctly. If your allusions are to myself, which I suppose they are, understand this,—I have given no one a right to gossip about me, and am not to be judged by frivolous conjectures, emanating from any quarter whatever. Let me know what you heard, and from whom you heard it.”

“May 3rd, 1848.

“All I can say to you about a certain matter is this: the report—if report there be—and if the lady, who seems to have been rather mystified, had not dreamt what she fancied had been told to her—must have had its origin in some absurd misunderstanding. I have given no one a right either to affirm, or to hint, in the most distant manner, that I was ‘publishing’—(humbug!).

Whoever has said it—if any one has, which I doubt—is no friend of mine. Though twenty books were ascribed to me, I should own none. I scout the idea utterly. Whoever, after I have distinctly rejected the charge, urges it upon me, will do an unkind and an ill-bred thing. The most profound obscurity is infinitely preferable to vulgar notoriety; and that notoriety I neither seek nor will have. If then any B—an, or G—an, should presume to bore you on the subject,—to ask you what ‘novel’ Miss Brontë has been ‘publishing,’ you can just say, with the distinct firmness of which you are perfect mistress, when you choose, that you are authorized by Miss Brontë to say, that she repels and disowns every accusation of the kind. You may add, if you please, that if any one has her confidence, you believe you have, and she has made no drivelling confessions to you on the subject. I am at a loss to conjecture from what source this rumour has come; and, I fear, it has far from a friendly origin. I am not certain, however, and I should be very glad if I could gain certainty. Should you hear anything more, please let me know. Your offer of ‘Simeon’s Life’an is a very kind one, and I thank you for it. I dare say Papa would like to see the work very much, as he knew Mr. Simeon. Laugh or scold A—out of the publishing notion; and believe me, through all chances and changes, whether calumniated or let alone,—Yours faithfully.

“C. BRONTË.”

The reason why Miss Brontë was so anxious to preserve her secret, was, I am told, that she had pledged her word to her sisters that it should not be revealed through her.

The dilemmas attendant on the publication of the sisters’ novels, under assumed names, were increasing upon them. Many critics insisted on believing, that all the fictions published as by three Bells were the works of one author, but written at different periods of his development and maturity. No doubt, this suspicion affected the reception of the books. Ever since the completion of Anne Brontë’s tale of “Agnes Grey,” she had been labouring at a second, “The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.” It is little known; the subject—the deterioration of a character, whose profligacy and ruin took their rise in habits of intemperance, so slight as to be only considered “good

fellowship”—was painfully discordant to one who would fain have sheltered herself from all but peaceful and religious ideas. “She had” (says her sister of that gentle “little one”), “in the course of her life, been called on to contemplate near at hand, and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused; hers was naturally a sensitive, reserved, and dejected nature; what she saw sunk very deeply into her mind; it did her harm. She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail (of course, with fictitious characters, incidents, and situations), as a warning to others. She hated her work, but would pursue it. When reasoned with on the subject, she regarded such reasonings as a temptation to self-indulgence. She must be honest; she must not varnish, soften, or conceal. This well-meant resolution brought on her misconstruction, and some abuse, which she bore, as it was her custom to bear whatever was unpleasant, with mild steady patience. She was a very sincere and practical Christian, but the tinge of religious melancholy communicated a sad shade to her brief blameless life.”

In the June of this year, “The Tenant of Wildfell Hall” was sufficiently near its completion to be submitted to the person who had previously published for Ellis and Acton Bell.

In consequence of his mode of doing business, considerable annoyance was occasioned both to Miss Brontë and to them. The circumstances, as detailed in a letter of hers to a friend in New Zealand, were these:—One morning at the beginning of July, a communication was received at the Parsonage from Messrs. Smith and Elder, which disturbed its quiet inmates not a little; as, though the matter brought under their notice was merely referred to as one which affected their literary reputation, they conceived it to have a bearing likewise upon their character. “Jane Eyre” had had a great run in America, and a publisher there had consequently bid high for early sheets of the next work by “Currer Bell.” These Messrs. Smith and Elder had promised to let him have. He was therefore greatly astonished, and not well pleased, to learn that a similar agreement had been entered into with another American house, and that the new tale was very shortly to appear. It turned out, upon inquiry, that the mistake had originated in Acton and Ellis Bell’s publisher having assured this American house that, to the best of his belief, “Jane Eyre,” “Wuthering Heights,” and “The Tenant of Wild fell

Hall” (which he pronounced superior to either of the other two) were all written by the same author.

Though Messrs. Smith and Elder distinctly stated in their letter that they did not share in such “belief,” the sisters were impatient till they had shown its utter groundlessness, and set themselves perfectly straight. With rapid decision, they resolved that Charlotte and Anne should start for London that very day, in order to prove their separate identity to Messrs. Smith and Elder, and demand from the credulous publisher his reasons for a “belief” so directly at variance with an assurance which had several times been given to him. Having arrived at this determination, they made their preparations with resolute promptness. There were many household duties to be performed that day; but they were all got through. The two sisters each packed up a change of dress in a small box, which they sent down to Keighley by an opportune cart; and after early tea, they set off to walk thither—no doubt in some excitement; for, independently of their cause of going to London, it was Anne’s first visit there. A great thunderstorm overtook them on their way that summer evening to the station; but they had no time to seek shelter. They only just caught the train at Keighley, arrived at Leeds, and were whirled up by the night train to London.

About eight o’clock on the Saturday morning, they arrived at the Chapter Coffee-house, Paternoster Row—a strange place, but they did not well know where else to go. They refreshed themselves by washing, and had some breakfast. Then they sat still for a few minutes, to consider what next should be done.

When they had been discussing their project in the quiet of Haworth Parsonage the day before, and planning the mode of setting about the business on which they were going to London, they had resolved to take a cab, if they should find it desirable, from their inn to Cornhill; but that, amidst the bustle and “queer state of inward excitement” in which they found themselves, as they sat and considered their position on the Saturday morning, they quite forgot even the possibility of hiring a conveyance; and when they set forth, they became so dismayed by the crowded streets, and the impeded crossings, that they stood still repeatedly, in complete despair of making progress, and were nearly an hour in walking the half-mile they had to go. Neither Mr. Smith nor Mr. Williams knew that they were coming;

they were entirely unknown to the publishers of “Jane Eyre,” who were not, in fact, aware whether the “Bells” were men or women, but had always written to them as to men.

On reaching Mr. Smith’s, Charlotte put his own letter into his hands; the same letter which had excited so much disturbance at Haworth Parsonage only twenty-four hours before. “Where did you get this?” said he,—as if he could not believe that the two young ladies dressed in black, of slight figures and diminutive stature, looking pleased yet agitated, could be the embodied Currer and Acton Bell, for whom curiosity had been hunting so eagerly in vain. An explanation ensued, and Mr. Smith at once began to form plans for their amusement and pleasure during their stay in London. He urged them to meet a few literary friends at his house; and this was a strong temptation to Charlotte, as amongst them were one or two of the writers whom she particularly wished to see; but her resolution to remain unknown induced her firmly to put it aside.

The sisters were equally persevering in declining Mr. Smith’s invitations to stay at his house. They refused to leave their quarters, saying they were not prepared for a long stay.

When they returned back to their inn, poor Charlotte paid for the excitement of the interview, which had wound up the agitation and hurry of the last twenty-four hours, by a racking headache and harassing sickness. Towards evening, as she rather expected some of the ladies of Mr. Smith’s family to call, she prepared herself for the chance, by taking a strong dose of sal-volatile,[ao] which roused her a little, but still, as she says, she was “in grievous bodily case,” when their visitors were announced, in full evening costume. The sisters had not understood that it had been settled that they were to go to the Opera, and therefore were not ready. Moreover, they had no fine elegant dresses either with them, or in the world. But Miss Brontë resolved to raise no objections in the acceptance of kindness. So, in spite of headache and weariness, they made haste to dress themselves in their plain high-made country garments.

Charlotte says, in an account which she gives to her friend of this visit to London, describing the entrance of her party into the Opera-house:—

“Fine ladies and gentlemen glanced at us, as we stood by the box-door, which was not yet opened, with a slight, graceful superciliousness, quite warranted by the circumstances. Still I felt pleasurably excited in spite of headache, sickness, and conscious clownishness; and I saw Anne was calm and gentle, which she always is. The performance was Rossini’s ‘Barber of Seville,’—very brilliant, though I fancy there are things I should like better. We got home after one o’clock. We had never been in bed the night before; had been in constant excitement for twenty-four hours; you may imagine we were tired. The next day, Sunday, Mr. Williams came early to take us to church; and in the afternoon Mr. Smith and his mother fetched us in a carriage, and took us to his house to dine.

“On Monday we went to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, the National Gallery, dined again at Mr. Smith’s, and then went home to tea with Mr. Williams at his house.

“On Tuesday morning, we left London, laden with books Mr. Smith had given us, and got safely home. A more jaded wretch than I looked, it would be difficult to conceive. I was thin when I went, but I was meagre indeed when I returned, my face looking grey and very old, with strange deep lines ploughed in it—my eyes stared unnaturally. I was weak and yet restless. In a while, however, these bad effects of excitement went off, and I regained my normal condition.”

The impression Miss Brontë made upon those with whom she first became acquainted during this visit to London, was of a person with clear judgment and fine sense; and though reserved, possessing unconsciously the power of drawing out others in conversation. She never expressed an opinion without assigning a reason for it; she never put a question without a definite purpose; and yet people felt at their ease in talking with her. All conversation with her was genuine and stimulating; and when she launched forth in praise or reprobation of books, or deeds, or works of art, her eloquence was indeed burning. She was thorough in all that she said or did; yet so open and fair in dealing with a subject, or contending with an opponent, that instead of rousing resentment, she merely convinced her hearers of her earnest zeal for the truth and right.

Not the least singular part of their proceedings was the place at which the sisters had chosen to stay.

Paternoster Row was for many years sacred to publishers. It is a narrow flagged street, lying under the shadow of St. Paul's; at each end there are posts placed, so as to prevent the passage of carriages, and thus preserve a solemn silence for the deliberations of the "Fathers of the Row." The dull warehouses on each side are mostly occupied at present by wholesale stationers; if they be publishers' shops, they show no attractive front to the dark and narrow street. Half-way up, on the left hand side, is the Chapter Coffee-house. I visited it last June. It was then unoccupied. It had the appearance of a dwelling-house two hundred years old or so, such as one sometimes sees in ancient country towns; the ceilings of the small rooms were low, and had heavy beams running, across them; the walls were wainscotted breast high; the staircase was shallow, broad, and dark, taking up much space in the centre of the house. This then was the Chapter Coffee-house, which, a century ago, was the resort of all the booksellers and publishers; and where the literary hacks, the critics, and even the wits, used to go in search of ideas or employment. This was the place about which Chatterton[11] wrote, in those delusive letters he sent to his mother at Bristol, while he was starving in London. "I am quite familiar at the Chapter Coffee-house, and know all the geniuses there." Here he heard of chances of employment; here his letters were to be left.

Years later, it became the tavern frequented by university men and country clergymen, who were up in London for a few days, and, having no private friends or access into society, were glad to learn what was going on in the world of letters, from the conversation which they were sure to hear in the coffee room. In Mr. Brontë's few and brief visits to town, during his residence at Cambridge, and the period of his curacy in Essex, he had staid at this house; hither he had brought his daughters, when he was convoying them to Brussels; and here they came now, from very ignorance where else to go. It was a place solely frequented by men; I believe there was but one female servant in the house. Few people slept there; some of the stated meetings of the Trade were held in it, as they had been for more than a century; and, occasionally, country booksellers, with now and then a clergyman, resorted to it; but it was a strange desolate place for the Miss

Brontë's to have gone to, from its purely business and masculine aspect. The old "grey-haired elderly man," who officiated as waiter, seems to have been touched from the very first with the quiet simplicity of the two ladies, and he tried to make them feel comfortable and at home in the long, low, dingy room up stairs, where the meetings of the Trade were held. The high narrow windows looked into the gloomy Row; the sisters, clinging together on the most remote window-seat, (as Mr. Smith tells me he found them, when he came, that Saturday evening, to take them to the Opera,) could see nothing of motion, or of change, in the grim, dark houses opposite, so near and close, although the whole breadth of the Row was between. The mighty roar of London was round them, like the sound of an unseen ocean, yet every footfall on the pavement below might be heard distinctly, in that unfrequented street. Such as it was, they preferred remaining at the Chapter Coffee-house, to accepting the invitation which Mr. Smith and his mother urged upon them; and, in after years, Charlotte says:—

"Since those days I have seen the West End, the parks, the fine squares; but I love the City far better. The City seems so much more in earnest; its business, its rush, its roar, are such serious things, sights, sounds. The City is getting its living—the West End but enjoying its pleasure. At the West End you may be amused; but in the City you are deeply excited." *(Villette*, vol. i., p. 89.)

Their wish had been to hear Dr. Croly on the Sunday morning, and Mr. Williams escorted them to St. Stephen's, Walbrook; but they were disappointed, as Dr. Croly did not preach. Mr. Williams also took them (as Miss Brontë has mentioned) to drink tea at his house. On the way thither, they had to pass through Kensington Gardens, and Miss Brontë was much "struck with the beauty of the scene, the fresh verdure of the turf, and the soft rich masses of foliage." From remarks on the different character of the landscape in the South to what it was in the North, she was led to speak of the softness and varied intonation of the voices of those with whom she conversed in London, which seem to have made a strong impression on both sisters. All this time those who came in contact with the "Miss Browns" (another pseudonym, also beginning with B.), seem only to have

regarded them as shy and reserved little country-women, with not much to say. Mr. Williams tells me that on the night when he accompanied the party to the Opera, as Charlotte ascended the flight of stairs leading from the grand entrance up to the lobby of the first tier of boxes, she was so much struck with the architectural effect of the splendid decorations of that vestibule and saloon, that involuntarily she slightly pressed his arm, and whispered, “You know I am not accustomed to this sort of thing.” Indeed, it must have formed a vivid contrast to what they were doing and seeing an hour or two earlier the night before, when they were trudging along, with beating hearts and high-strung courage, on the road between Haworth and Keighley, hardly thinking of the thunder-storm that beat about their heads, for the thoughts which filled them of how they would go straight away to London, and prove that they were really two people, and not one impostor. It was no wonder that they returned to Haworth utterly fagged and worn out, after the fatigue and excitement of this visit.

The next notice I find of Charlotte’s life at this time is of a different character to any thing telling of enjoyment.

“July 28th.

“Branwell is the same in conduct as ever. His constitution seems much shattered. Papa, and sometimes all of us, have sad nights with him. He sleeps most of the day, and consequently will lie awake at night. But has not every house its trial?”

While her most intimate friends were yet in ignorance of the fact of her authorship of “Jane Eyre,” she received a letter from one of them, making inquiries about Casterton School. It is but right to give her answer, written on August 28th, 1848.

“Since you wish to hear from me while you are from home, I will write without further delay. It often happens that when we linger at first in answering a friend’s letter, obstacles occur to retard us to an inexcusably late period. In my last, I forgot to answer a question which you asked me,

and was sorry afterwards for the omission. I will begin, therefore, by replying to it, though I fear what information I can give will come a little late. You said Mrs.—had some thoughts of sending—to school, and wished to know whether the Clergy Daughters' School at Casterton was an eligible place. My personal knowledge of that institution is very much out of date, being derived from the experience of twenty years ago. The establishment was at that time in its infancy, and a sad ricketty infancy it was. Typhus fever decimated the school periodically; and consumption and scrofula, in every variety of form bad air and water, bad and insufficient diet can generate, preyed on the ill-fated pupils. It would not then have been a fit place for any of Mrs.—'s children; but I understand it is very much altered for the better since those days. The school is removed from Cowan Bridge (a situation as unhealthy as it was picturesque—low, damp, beautiful with wood and water) to Casterton. The accommodations, the diet, the discipline, the system of tuition—all are, I believe, entirely altered and greatly improved. I was told that such pupils as behaved well, and remained at the school till their education was finished, were provided with situations as governesses, if they wished to adopt the vocation, and much care was exercised in the selection; it was added, that they were also furnished with an excellent wardrobe on leaving Casterton. . . . . The oldest family in Haworth failed lately, and have quitted the neighbourhood where their fathers resided before them for, it is said, thirteen generations.... Papa, I am most thankful to say, continues in very good health, considering his age; his sight, too, rather, I think, improves than deteriorates. My sisters likewise are pretty well."

But the dark cloud was hanging over that doomed household, and gathering blackness every hour.

On October the 9th, she thus writes:—

"The past three weeks have been a dark interval in our humble home. Branwell's constitution had been failing fast all the summer: but still, neither the doctors nor himself thought him so near his end as he was. He was entirely confined to his bed but for one single day, and was in the

village two days before his death. He died, after twenty minutes' struggle, on Sunday morning, September 24th. He was perfectly conscious till the last agony came on. His mind had undergone the peculiar change which frequently precedes death, two days previously; the calm of better feelings filled it; a return of natural affection marked his last moments. He is in God's hands now; and the All-Powerful is likewise the All-Merciful. A deep conviction that he rests at last—rests well, after his brief, erring, suffering, feverish life—fills and quiets my mind now. The final separation, the spectacle of his pale corpse, gave me more acute bitter pain than I could have imagined. Till the last hour comes, we never know how much we can forgive, pity, regret a near relative. All his vices were and are nothing now. We remember only his woes. Papa was acutely distressed at first, but, on the whole, has borne the event well. Emily and Anne are pretty well, though Anne is always delicate, and Emily has a cold and cough at present. It was my fate to sink at the crisis, when I should have collected my strength. Headache and sickness came on first on the Sunday; I could not regain my appetite. Then internal pain attacked me. I became at once much reduced. It was impossible to touch a morsel. At last, bilious fever declared itself. I was confined to bed a week,—a dreary week. But, thank God! health seems now returning. I can sit up all day, and take moderate nourishment. The doctor said at first, I should be very slow in recovering, but I seem to get on faster than he anticipated. I am truly much better."

I have heard, from one who attended Branwell in his last illness, that he resolved on standing up to die. He had repeatedly said, that as long as there was life there was strength of will to do what it chose; and when the last agony came on, he insisted on assuming the position just mentioned. I have previously stated, that when his fatal attack came on, his pockets were found filled with old letters from the woman to whom he was attached. He died! she lives still,—in May Fair. The Eumenides, I suppose, went out of existence at the time when the wail was heard, "Great Pan is dead." I think we could better have spared him than those awful Sisters who sting dead conscience into life.

I turn from her for ever. Let us look once more into the Parsonage at Haworth.

“Oct. 29th, 1848.

“I think I have now nearly got over the effects of my late illness, and am almost restored to my normal condition of health. I sometimes wish that it was a little higher, but we ought to be content with such blessings as we have, and not pine after those that are out of our reach. I feel much more uneasy about my sister than myself just now. Emily’s cold and cough are very obstinate. I fear she has pain in her chest, and I sometimes catch a shortness in her breathing, when she has moved at all quickly. She looks very thin and pale. Her reserved nature occasions me great uneasiness of mind. It is useless to question her; you get no answers. It is still more useless to recommend remedies; they are never adopted. Nor can I shut my eyes to Anne’s great delicacy of constitution. The late sad event has, I feel, made me more apprehensive than common. I cannot help feeling much depressed sometimes. I try to leave all in God’s hands; to trust in His goodness; but faith and resignation are difficult to practise under some circumstances. The weather has been most unfavourable for invalids of late; sudden changes of temperature, and cold penetrating winds have been frequent here. Should the atmosphere become more settled, perhaps a favourable effect might be produced on the general health, and these harassing colds and coughs be removed. Papa has not quite escaped, but he has so far stood it better than any of us. You must not mention my going to —this winter. I could not, and would not, leave home on any account. Miss —has been for some years out of health now. These things make one feel, as well as *know,* that this world is not our abiding-place. We should not knit human ties too close, or clasp human affections too fondly. They must leave us, or we must leave them, one day. God restore health and strength to all who need it!”

I go on now with her own affecting words in the biographical notices of her sisters.

“But a great change approached. Affliction came in that shape which to anticipate is dread; to look back on grief. In the very heat and burden of the day, the labourers failed over their work. My sister Emily first declined..... Never in all her life had she lingered over any task that lay before her, and she did not linger now. She sank rapidly. She made haste to leave us.... Day by day, when I saw with what a front she met suffering, I looked on her with an anguish of wonder and love. I have seen nothing like it; but, indeed, I have never seen her parallel in anything. Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone. The awful point was that while full of ruth for others, on herself she had no pity; the spirit was inexorable to the flesh; from the trembling hands, the unnerved limbs, the fading eyes, the same service was exacted as they had rendered in health. To stand by and witness this, and not dare to remonstrate, was a pain no words can render.”

In fact, Emily never went out of doors after the Sunday succeeding Branwell’s death. She made no complaint; she would not endure questioning: she rejected sympathy and help. Many a time did Charlotte and Anne drop their sewing, or cease from their writing, to listen with wrung hearts to the failing step, the laboured breathing, the frequent pauses, with which their sister climbed the short staircase; yet they dared not notice what they observed, with pangs of suffering even deeper than hers. They dared not notice it in words, far less by the caressing assistance of a helping arm or hand. They sat, still and silent.

“Nov. 23d, 1848.

“I told you Emily was ill, in my last letter. She has not rallied yet. She is very ill. I believe, if you were to see her, your impression would be that there is no hope. A more hollow, wasted, pallid aspect, I have not beheld. The deep tight cough continues; the breathing after the least exertion is a rapid pant; and these symptoms are accompanied by pains in the chest and side. Her pulse, the only time she allowed it to be felt, was found to beat 115 per minute. In this state she resolutely refuses to see a doctor; she will give no explanation of her feelings, she will scarcely allow her feelings to be alluded to. Our position is, and has been for some weeks, exquisitely

painful. God only knows how all this is to terminate. More than once, I have been forced boldly to regard the terrible event of her loss as possible, and even probable. But nature shrinks from such thoughts. I think Emily seems the nearest thing to my heart in the world."

When a doctor had been sent for, and was in the very house, Emily refused to see him. Her sisters could only describe to him what symptoms they had observed; and the medicines which he sent she would not take, denying that she was ill.

"Dec. 10th, 1848.

"I hardly know what to say to you about the subject which now interests me the most keenly of any thing in this world, for, in truth, I hardly know what to think myself. Hope and fear fluctuate daily. The pain in her side and chest is better; the cough, the shortness of breath, the extreme emaciation continue. I have endured, however, such tortures of uncertainty on this subject, that, at length, I could endure it no longer; and as her repugnance to seeing a medical man continues immutable,—as she declares 'no poisoning doctor' shall come near her,—I have written, unknown to her, to an eminent physician in London, giving as minute a statement of her case and symptoms as I could draw up, and requesting an opinion. I expect an answer in a day or two. I am thankful to say, that my own health at present is very tolerable. It is well such is the case; for Anne, with the best will in the world to be useful, is really too delicate to do or bear much. She, too, at present, has frequent pains in the side. Papa is also pretty well, though Emily's state renders him very anxious.

"The—s (Anne Bronte's former pupils)[ap] were here about a week ago. They are attractive and stylish-looking girls. They seemed overjoyed to see Anne: when I went into the room, they were clinging round her like two children—she, meantime, looking perfectly quiet and passive..... I. and H. took it into their heads to come here. I think it probable offence was taken on that occasion,—from what cause, I know not; and as, if such be the case, the grudge must rest upon purely imaginary grounds,—and since, besides, I have other things to think about, my mind rarely dwells upon the subject. If Emily were but well, I feel as if I should not care who neglected,

misunderstood, or abused me. I would rather you were not of the number either. The crab-cheese arrived safely. Emily has just reminded me to thank you for it: it looks very nice. I wish she were well enough to eat it."

But Emily was growing rapidly worse. I remember Miss Brontë's shiver at recalling the pang she felt when, after having searched in the little hollows and sheltered crevices of the moors for a lingering spray of heather —just one spray, however withered—to take in to Emily, she saw that the flower was not recognized by the dim and indifferent eyes. Yet, to the last, Emily adhered tenaciously to her habits of independence. She would suffer no one to assist her. Any effort to do so roused the old stern spirit. One Tuesday morning, in December, she arose and dressed herself as usual, making many a pause, but doing every thing for herself, and even endeavoring to take up her employment of sewing: the servants looked on, and knew what the catching, rattling breath, and the glazing of the eye too surely foretold; but she kept at her work; and Charlotte and Anne, though full of unspeakable dread, had still the faintest spark of hope. On that morning Charlotte wrote thus,—probably in the very presence of her dying sister:—

"Tuesday.

"I should have written to you before, if I had had one word of hope to say; but I have not. She grows daily weaker. The physician's opinion was expressed too obscurely to be of use. He sent some medicine, which she would not take. Moments so dark as these I have never known. I pray for God's support to us all. Hitherto He has granted it."

The morning drew on to noon. Emily was worse: she could only whisper in gasps. Now, when it was too late, she said to Charlotte, "If you will send for a doctor, I will him see now." About two o'clock she died.

"Dec. 21st, 1848.

“Emily suffers no more from pain or weakness now. She never will suffer more in this world. She is gone, after a hard, short conflict. She died on *Tuesday*, the very day I wrote to you. I thought it very possible she might be with us still for weeks; and a few hours afterwards, she was in eternity. Yes; there is no Emily in time or on earth now. Yesterday we put her poor, wasted, mortal frame quietly under the Church pavement. We are very calm at present. Why should we be otherwise? The anguish of seeing her suffer is over; the spectacle of the pains of death is gone by; the funeral day is past. We feel she is at peace. No need now to tremble for the hard frost and the keen wind. Emily does not feel them. She died in a time of promise. We saw her taken from life in its prime. But it is God’s will and the place where she is gone is better than that she has left.

“God has sustained me, in a way that I marvel at, through such agony as I had not conceived. I now look at Anne, and wish she were well and strong; but she is neither; nor is papa. Could you now come to us for a few days? I would not ask you to stay long. Write and tell me if you could come next week, and by what train. I would try to send a gig for you to Keighley. You will, I trust, find us tranquil. Try to come. I never so much needed the consolation of a friend’s presence. Pleasure, of course, there would be none for you in the visit, except what your kind heart would teach you to find in doing good to others.”

As the old bereaved father and his two surviving children followed the coffin to the grave, they were joined by Keeper, Emily’s fierce, faithful bull-dog. He walked alongside of the mourners, and into the church, and stayed quietly there all the time that the burial service was being read. When he came home, he lay down at Emily’s chamber door, and howled pitifully for many days. Anne Brontë drooped and sickened more rapidly from that time; and so ended the year 1848.

CHAPTER III.

An article on “Vanity Fair” and “Jane Eyre” had appeared in the “Quarterly Review” of December, 1848.[1] Some weeks after, Miss Brontë wrote to her publishers, asking why it had not been sent to her; and conjecturing that it was unfavourable, she repeated her previous request, that whatever was done with the laudatory, all critiques adverse to the novel might be forwarded to her without fail. The “Quarterly Review” was accordingly sent. I am not aware that Miss Brontë took any greater notice of the article than to place a few sentences out of it in the mouth of a hard and vulgar woman in “Shirley,” where they are so much in character, that few have recognised them as a quotation. The time when the article was read was good for Miss Brontë; she was numbed to all petty annoyances by the grand severity of Death. Otherwise she might have felt more keenly than they deserved the criticisms which, while striving to be severe, failed in logic, owing to the misuse of prepositions; and have smarted under conjectures as to the authorship of “Jane Eyre,” which, intended to be acute, were merely flippant. But flippancy takes a graver name when directed against an author by an anonymous writer. We call it then cowardly insolence.

Every one has a right to form his own conclusion respecting the merits and demerits of a book. I complain not of the judgment which the reviewer passes on “Jane Eyre.” Opinions as to its tendency varied then, as they do now. While I write, I receive a letter from a clergyman in America in which he says: “We have in our sacred of sacreds a special shelf, highly adorned, as a place we delight to honour, of novels which we recognise as having had a good influence on character, our character. Foremost is ‘Jane Eyre.’ ”

Nor do I deny the existence of a diametrically opposite judgment. And so (as I trouble not myself about the reviewer’s style of composition) I leave his criticisms regarding the merits of the work on one side. But when—forgetting the chivalrous spirit of the good and noble Southey, who said: “In reviewing anonymous works myself, when I have known the authors I have never mentioned them, taking it for granted they had sufficient reasons for avoiding the publicity”—the “Quarterly” reviewer goes on into gossiping

conjectures as to who Currer Bell really is, and pretends to decide on what the writer may be from the book, I protest with my whole soul against such want of Christian charity. Not even the desire to write a “smart article,” which shall be talked about in London, when the faint mask of the anonymous can be dropped at pleasure if the cleverness of the review be admired—not even this temptation can excuse the stabbing cruelty of the judgment. Who is he that should say of an unknown woman: “She must be one who for some sufficient reason has long forfeited the society of her sex”? Is he one who has led a wild and struggling and isolated life,—seeing few but plain and outspoken Northerns, unskilled in the euphuisms which assist the polite world to skim over the mention of vice? Has he striven through long weeping years to find excuses for the lapse of an only brother; and through daily contact with a poor lost profligate, been compelled into a certain familiarity with the vices that his soul abhors? Has he, through trials, close following in dread march through his household, sweeping the hearthstone bare of life and love, still striven hard for strength to say, “It is the Lord! let Him do what seemeth to Him good”—and sometimes striven in vain, until the kindly Light returned? If through all these dark waters the scornful reviewer has passed clear, refined, free from stain,—with a soul that has never in all its agonies, cried “lama sabachthani,”—still, even then let him pray with the Publican rather than judge with the Pharisee.[2]

“Jan. 10th, 1849.

“Anne had a very tolerable day yesterday, and a pretty quiet night last night, though she did not sleep much. Mr. Wheelhouse ordered the blister to be put on again. She bore it without sickness. I have just dressed it, and she is risen and come down stairs. She looks somewhat pale and sickly. She has had one dose of the cod-liver oil; it smells and tastes like train oil. I am trying to hope, but the day is windy, cloudy, and stormy. My spirits fall at intervals very low; then I look where you counsel me to look, beyond earthly tempests and sorrows. I seem to get strength, if not consolation. It will not do to anticipate. I feel that hourly. In the night, I awake and long for morning; then my heart is wrung. Papa continues much the same; he was very faint when he came down to breakfast. . . . . Dear E—, your friendship

is some comfort to me. I am thankful for it. I see few lights through the darkness of the present time; but amongst them the constancy of a kind heart attached to me is one of the most cheering and serene."

"Jan. 15th, 1849.

"I can scarcely say that Anne is worse, nor can I say she is better. She varies often in the course of a day, yet each day is passed pretty much the same. The morning is usually the best time; the afternoon and the evening the most feverish. Her cough is the most troublesome at night, but it is rarely violent. The pain in her arm still disturbs her. She takes the cod-liver oil and carbonate of iron regularly; she finds them both nauseous, but especially the oil. Her appetite is small indeed. Do not fear that I shall relax in my care of her. She is too precious not to be cherished with all the fostering strength I have. Papa, I am thankful to say, has been a good deal better this last day or two.

"As to your queries about myself, I can only say, that if I continue as I am I shall do very well. I have not yet got rid of the pains in my chest and back. They oddly return with every change of weather; and are still sometimes accompanied with a little soreness and hoarseness, but I combat them steadily with pitch plasters and bran tea. I should think it silly and wrong indeed not to be regardful of my own health at present; it would not do to be ill *now.*

"I avoid looking forward or backward, and try to keep looking upward. This is not the time to regret, dread, or weep. What I have and ought to do is very distinctly laid out for me; what I want, and pray for, is strength to perform it. The days pass in a slow, dark march; the nights are the test; the sudden wakings from restless sleep, the revived knowledge that one lies in her grave, and another not at my side, but in a separate and sick bed. However, God is over all."

"Jan. 22nd, 1849.

"Anne really did seem to be a little better during some mild days last week, but to-day she looks very pale and languid again. She perseveres with

the cod-liver oil, but still finds it very nauseous.

“She is truly obliged to you for the soles for her shoes, and finds them extremely comfortable. I am to commission you to get her just such a respirator as Mrs.—had. She would not object to give a higher price, if you thought it better. If it is not too much trouble, you may likewise get me a pair of soles; you can send them and the respirator when you send the box. You must put down the price of all, and we will pay you in a Post Office order. Wuthering Heights’ was given to you. I have sent—neither letter nor parcel. I had nothing but dreary news to write, so preferred that others should tell her. I have not written to—either. I cannot write, except when I am quite obliged.”

“Feb. 11th, 1849.

“We received the box and its contents quite safely today. The pen-wipers are very pretty, and we are very much obliged to you for them. I hope the respirator will be useful to Anne, in case she should ever be well enough to go out again. She continues very much in the same state—I trust not greatly worse, though she is becoming very thin. I fear it would be only self-delusion to fancy her better. What effect the advancing season may have on her, I know not; perhaps the return of really warm weather may give nature a happy stimulus. I tremble at the thought of any change to cold wind or frost. Would that March were well over! Her mind seems generally serene, and her sufferings hitherto are nothing like Emily’s. The thought of what may be to come grows more familiar to my mind; but it is a sad, dreary guest.”

“March 16th, 1849.

“We have found the past week a somewhat trying one; it has not been cold, but still there have been changes of temperature whose effect Anne has felt unfavourably. She is not, I trust, seriously worse, but her cough is at times very hard and painful, and her strength rather diminished than improved. I wish the month of March was well over. You are right in conjecturing that I am somewhat depressed; at times I certainly am. It was

almost easier to bear up when the trial was at its crisis than now. The feeling of Emily's loss does not diminish as time wears on; it often makes itself most acutely recognised. It brings too an inexpressible sorrow with it; and then the future is dark. Yet I am well aware, it will not do either to complain, or sink, and I strive to do neither. Strength, I hope and trust, will yet be given in proportion to the burden; but the pain of my position is not one likely to lessen with habit. Its solitude and isolation are oppressive circumstances, yet I do not wish for any friends to stay with me; I could not do with any one—not even you—to share the sadness of the house; it would rack me intolerably. Meantime, judgment is still blent with mercy. Anne's sufferings still continue mild. It is my nature, when left alone, to struggle on with a certain perseverance, and I believe God will help me."

Anne had been delicate all her life; a fact which perhaps made them less aware than they would otherwise have been, of the true nature of those fatal first symptoms. Yet they seem to have lost but little time before they sent for the first advice that could be procured. She was examined with the stethoscope, and the dreadful fact was announced that her lungs were affected, and that tubercular consumption had already made considerable progress. A system of treatment was prescribed, which was afterwards ratified by the opinion of Dr. Forbes.[aq]

For a short time they hoped that the disease was arrested. Charlotte—herself ill with a complaint that severely tried her spirits—was the ever-watchful nurse of this youngest, last sister. One comfort was that Anne was the patientest, gentlest invalid that could be. Still, there were hours, days, weeks of inexpressible anguish to be borne; under the pressure of which Charlotte could only pray; and pray she did, right earnestly. Thus she writes on March 24th:—

"Anne's decline is gradual and fluctuating; but its nature is not doubtful. . . . . In spirit she is resigned: at heart she is, I believe, a true Christian..... May God support her and all of us through the trial of lingering sickness,

and aid her in the last hour, when the struggle which separates soul from body must be gone through! We saw Emily torn from the midst of us when our hearts clung to her with intense attachment..... She was scarce buried when Anne's health failed..... These things would be too much, if reason, unsupported by religion, were condemned to bear them alone. I have cause to be most thankful for the strength that has hitherto been vouchsafed both to my father and to myself. God, I think, is specially merciful to old age; and for my own part, trials, which in perspective would have seemed to me quite intolerable, when they actually came, I endured without prostration. Yet I must confess that, in the time which has elapsed since Emily's death, there have been moments of solitary, deep, inert affliction, far harder to bear than those which immediately followed our loss. The crisis of bereavement has an acute pang which goads to exertion; the desolate after-feeling sometimes paralyzes. I have learnt that we are not to find solace in our own strength; we must seek it in God's omnipotence. Fortitude is good; but fortitude itself must be shaken under us to teach us how weak we are!"

All through this illness of Anne's, Charlotte had the comfort of being able to talk to her about her state; a comfort rendered inexpressibly great by the contrast which it presented to the recollection of Emily's rejection of all sympathy. If a proposal for Anne's benefit was made, Charlotte could speak to her about it, and the nursing and dying sister could consult with each other as to its desirability. I have seen but one of Anne's letters; it is the only time we seem to be brought into direct personal contact with this gentle, patient girl. In order to give the requisite preliminary explanation, I must state that the family of friends, to which E—belonged, proposed that Anne should come to them; in order to try what change of air and diet, and the company of kindly people could do towards restoring her to health. In answer to this proposal, Charlotte writes:—

"March 24th.

"I read your kind note to Anne, and she wishes me to thank you sincerely for your friendly proposal. She feels, of course, that it would not do to take advantage of it, by quartering an invalid upon the inhabitants of—; but she

intimates there is another way in which you might serve her, perhaps with some benefit to yourself as well as to her. Should it, a month or two hence, be deemed advisable that she should go either to the sea-side, or to some inland watering-place—and should papa be disinclined to move, and I consequently obliged to remain at home—she asks, could you be her companion? Of course I need not add that in the event of such an arrangement being made, you would be put to no expense. This, dear E., is Anne's proposal; I make it to comply with her wish; but for my own part, I must add that I see serious objections to your accepting it—objections I cannot name to her. She continues to vary; is sometimes worse, and sometimes better, as the weather changes; but, on the whole, I fear she loses strength. Papa says her state is most precarious; she may be spared for some time, or a sudden alteration might remove her before we are aware. Were such an alteration to take place while she was far from home, and alone with you, it would be terrible. The idea of it distresses me inexpressibly, and I tremble whenever she alludes to the project of a journey. In short, I wish we could gain time, and see how she gets on. If she leaves home, it certainly should not be in the capricious month of May, which is proverbially trying to the weak. June would be a safer month. If we could reach June, I should have good hopes of her getting through the summer. Write such an answer to this note as I can show Anne. You can write any additional remarks to me on a separate piece of paper. Do not consider yourself as confined to discussing only our sad affairs. I am interested in all that interests you."

From Anne Brontë.

"April 5th, 1849.

"My dear Miss—,—I thank you greatly for your kind letter, and your ready compliance with my proposal, as far as the will can go at least. I see, however, that your friends are unwilling that you should undertake the responsibility of accompanying me under present circumstances. But I do not think there would be any great responsibility in the matter. I know, and everybody knows, that you would be as kind and helpful as any one could possibly be, and I hope I should not be very troublesome. It would be as a

companion, not as a nurse, that I should wish for your company; otherwise I should not venture to ask it. As for your kind and often-repeated invitation to—, pray give my sincere thanks to your mother and sisters, but tell them I could not think of inflicting my presence upon them as I now am. It is very kind of them to make so light of the trouble, but still there must be more or less, and certainly no pleasure, from the society of a silent invalid stranger. I hope, however, that Charlotte will by some means make it possible to accompany me after all. She is certainly very delicate, and greatly needs a change of air and scene to renovate her constitution. And then your going with me before the end of May, is apparently out of the question, unless you are disappointed in your visitors; but I should be reluctant to wait till then, if the weather would at all permit an earlier departure. You say May is a trying month, and so say others. The earlier part is often cold enough, I acknowledge, but, according to my experience, we are almost certain of some fine warm days in the latter half, when the laburnums and lilacs are in bloom; whereas June is often cold, and July generally wet. But I have a more serious reason than this for my impatience of delay. The doctors say that change of air or removal to a better climate would hardly ever fail of success in consumptive cases, if the remedy were taken in time; but the reason why there are so many disappointments is, that it is generally deferred till it is too late. Now I would not commit this error; and, to say the truth, though I suffer much less from pain and fever than I did when you were with us, I am decidedly weaker, and very much thinner. My cough still troubles me a good deal, especially in the night, and, what seems worse than all, I am subject to great shortness of breath on going upstairs or any slight exertion. Under these circumstances, I think there is no time to be lost. I have no horror of death: if I thought it inevitable, I think I could quietly resign myself to the prospect, in the hope that you, dear Miss —, would give as much of your company as you possibly could to Charlotte, and be a sister to her in my stead. But I wish it would please God to spare me, not only for Papa’s and Charlotte’s sakes, but because I long to do some good in the world before I leave it. I have many schemes in my head for future practice—humble and limited indeed—but still I should not like them all to come to nothing, and myself to have lived to so little purpose. But God’s will be done. Remember me respectfully to your mother and sisters, and believe me, dear Miss—, yours most affectionately,

“ANNE BRONTË.”

It must have been about this time that Anne composed her last verses, before “the desk was closed, and the pen laid aside for ever.”

I.

“I hoped that with the brave and strong
My portioned task might lie;
To toil amid the busy throng,
With purpose pure and high.

II.

“But God has fixed another part,
And He has fixed it well:
I said so with my bleeding heart,
When first the anguish fell.

III.

“Thou, God, hast taken our delight,
Our treasured hope, away;
Thou bid‘st us now weep through the night,
And sorrow through the day.

IV.

“These weary hours will not be lost,
These days of misery,—

These nights of darkness, anguish-tost,—
Can I but turn to Thee.

V.

“With secret labour to sustain
In humble patience every blow;
To gather fortitude from pain,
And hope and holiness from woe.

VI.

“Thus let me serve Thee from my heart,
Whate‘er may be my written fate;
Whether thus early to depart,
Or yet a while to wait.

VII.

“If Thou should’st bring me back to life,
More humbled I should be;
More wise—more strengthened for the strife,
More apt to lean on Thee.

VIII.

“Should death be standing at the gate,
Thus should I keep my vow;
But, Lord, whatever be my fate,
Oh let me serve Thee now!”

I take Charlotte’s own words as the best record of her thoughts and feelings during all this terrible time.

“April 12th.

“I read Anne’s letter to you; it was touching enough, as you say. If there were no hope beyond this world,—no eternity,—no life to come,—Emily’s fate, and that which threatens Anne, would be heart-breaking. I cannot forget Emily’s death-day; it becomes a more fixed, a darker, a more frequently recurring idea in my mind than ever. It was very terrible. She was torn, conscious, panting, reluctant, though resolute, out of a happy life. But it *will not do* to dwell on these things.

“I am glad your friends object to your going with Anne; it would never do. To speak truth, even if your mother and sisters consented, I never could. It is not that there is any laborious attention to pay her; she requires, and will accept, but little nursing; but there would be hazard, and anxiety of mind, beyond what you ought to be subject to. If, a month or six weeks hence, she continues to wish for a change as much as she does now, I shall (D.V) go with her myself It will certainly be my paramount duty; other cares must be made subservient to that. I have consulted Mr. T—: he does not object, and recommends Scarborough, which was Anne’s own choice. I trust affairs may be so ordered, that you may be able to be with us at least part of the time..... Whether in lodgings or not, I should wish to be boarded. Providing oneself, is, I think, an insupportable nuisance. I don’t like keeping provisions in a cupboard, locking up, being pillaged, and all that. It is a petty, wearing annoyance.”

The progress of Anne’s illness was slower than that of Emily’s had been; and she was too unselfish to refuse trying means, from which, if she herself had little hope of benefit, her friends might hereafter derive a mournful satisfaction.

“I began to flatter myself she was getting strength. But the change to frost has told upon her; she suffers more of late. Still her illness has none of the fearful rapid symptoms which appalled in Emily’s case. Could she only get

over the spring. I hope summer may do much for her, and then early removal to a warmer locality for the winter might, at least, prolong her life. Could we only reckon upon another year, I should be thankful; but can we do this for the healthy? A few days ago I wrote to have Dr. Forbes' opinion

.... He warned us against entertaining sanguine hopes of recovery. The cod-liver oil he considers a peculiarly efficacious medicine. He, too, disapproved of change of residence for the present. There is some feeble consolation in thinking we are doing the very best that can be done. The agony of forced, total neglect, is not now felt, as during Emily's illness. Never may we be doomed to feel such agony again. It was terrible. I have felt much less of the disagreeable pains in my chest lately, and much less also of the soreness and hoarseness. I tried an application of hot vinegar, which seemed to do good."

"May 1st.

"I was glad to hear that when we go to Scarborough, you will be at liberty to go with us, but the journey and its consequences still continue a source of great anxiety to me; I must try to put it off two or three weeks longer if I can; perhaps by that time the milder season may have given Anne more strength,—perhaps it will be otherwise; I cannot tell. The change to fine weather has not proved beneficial to her so far. She has sometimes been so weak, and suffered so much from pain in the side, during the last few days, that I have not known what to think.... She may rally again, and be much better, but there must be some improvement before I can feel justified in taking her away from home. Yet to delay is painful; for, as is always the case, I believe, under her circumstances, she seems herself not half conscious of the necessity for such delay. She wonders, I believe, why I don't talk more about the journey; it grieves me to think she may even be hurt by my seeming tardiness. She is very much emaciated,—far more than when you were with us; her arms are no thicker than a little child's. The least exertion brings a shortness of breath. She goes out a little every day, but we creep rather than walk.... Papa continues pretty well;—I hope I shall be enabled to bear up. So far, I have reason for thankfulness to God."

May had come, and brought the milder weather longed for; but Anne was worse for the very change. A little later on, it became colder, and she rallied, and poor Charlotte began to hope that, if May were once over, she might last for a long time. Miss Brontë wrote to engage the lodgings at Scarborough,—a place which Anne had formerly visited with the family to whom she was governess. They took a good-sized sitting-room, and an airy double-bedded room (both commanding a sea-view) , in one of the best situations of the town. Money was as nothing in comparison with life: besides, Anne had a small legacy left to her by her godmother, and they felt that she could not better employ this than in obtaining what might prolong life, if not restore health. On May 16th, Charlotte writes:

"It is with a heavy heart I prepare; and earnestly do I wish the fatigue of the journey were well over. It may be borne better than I expect; for temporary stimulus often does much; but when I see the daily increasing weakness, I know not what to think. I fear you will be shocked when you see Anne; but be on your guard, dear E—, not to express your feelings; indeed, I can trust both your self-possession and your kindness. I wish my judgment sanctioned the step of going to Scarborough, more fully than it does. You ask how I have arranged about leaving Papa. I could make no special arrangement. He wishes me to go with Anne, and would not hear of Mr. N—'s coming, or anything of that kind; so I do what I believe is for the best, and leave the result to Providence."

They planned to rest and spend a night at York; and, at Anne's desire, arranged to make some purchases there. Charlotte ends the letter to her friend, in which she tells her all this, with—

"May 23rd.

"I wish it seemed less like a dreary mockery in us to talk of buying bonnets, &c. Anne was very ill yesterday. She had difficulty of breathing all day, even when sitting perfectly still. To-day she seems better again. I long for the moment to come when the experiment of the sea-air will be tried. Will it do her good? I cannot tell; I can only wish. Oh! if it would please

God to strengthen and revive Anne, how happy we might be together: His will, however, be done!”

The two sisters left Haworth on Thursday, May 24th. They were to have done so the day before, and had made an appointment with their friend to meet them at the Leeds Station, in order that they might all proceed together. But on Wednesday morning Anne was so ill, that it was impossible for the sisters to set out; yet they had no means of letting their friend know of this, and she consequently arrived at the Leeds station at the time specified. There she sate waiting for several hours. It struck her as strange at the time—and it almost seems ominous to her fancy now—that twice over, from two separate arrivals on the line by which she was expecting her friends, coffins were carried forth, and placed in hearses which were in waiting for their dead, as she was waiting for one in four days to become so.

The next day she could bear suspense no longer, and set out for Haworth, reaching there just in time to carry the feeble, fainting invalid into the chaise which stood at the gate to take them down to Keighley. The servant who stood at the Parsonage gates, saw Death written on her face, and spoke of it. Charlotte saw it and did not speak of it,—it would have been giving the dread too distinct a form; and if this last darling yearned for the change to Scarborough, go she should, however Charlotte’s heart might be wrung by impending fear. The lady who accompanied them, Charlotte’s beloved friend of more than twenty years, has kindly written out for me the following account of the journey—and of the end.[3]

“She left her home May 24th, 1849—died May 28th. Her life was calm, quiet, spiritual: such was her end. Through the trials and fatigues of the journey, she evinced the pious courage and fortitude of a martyr. Dependence and helplessness were ever with her a far sorer trial than hard, racking pain.

“The first stage of our journey was to York; and here the dear invalid was so revived, so cheerful, and so happy, we drew consolation, and trusted that at least temporary improvement was to be derived from the change which she had so longed for and her friends had so dreaded for her.

“By her request we went to the Minster, and to her it was an overpowering pleasure; not for its own imposing and impressive grandeur only, but because it brought to her susceptible nature a vital and overwhelming sense of omnipotence. She said, while gazing at the structure, ‘If finite power can do this, what is the ... ?’ and here emotion stayed her speech, and she was hastened to a less exciting scene.

“Her weakness of body was great, but her gratitude for every mercy was greater. After such an exertion as walking to her bedroom, she would clasp her hands and raise her eyes in silent thanks, and she did this not to the exclusion of wonted prayer, for that too was performed on bended knee, ere she accepted the rest of her couch.

“On the 25th we arrived at Scarborough; our dear invalid having, during the journey, directed our attention to every prospect worthy of notice.

“On the 26th she drove on the sands for an hour; and lest the poor donkey should be urged by its driver to a greater speed than her tender heart thought right, she took the reins, and drove herself. When joined by her friends, she was charging the boy-master of the donkey to treat the poor animal well. She was ever fond of dumb things, and would give up her own comfort for them.

“On Sunday, the 27th, she wished to go to church, and her eye brightened with the thought of once more worshipping her God amongst her fellow-creatures. We thought it prudent to dissuade her from the attempt, though it was evident her heart was longing to join in the public act of devotion and praise.

“She walked a little in the afternoon, and meeting with a sheltered and comfortable seat near the beach, she begged we would leave her, and enjoy the various scenes near at hand, which were new to us but familiar to her. She loved the place, and wished us to share her preference.

“The evening closed in with the most glorious sunset ever witnessed. The castle on the cliff stood in proud glory gilded by the rays of the declining sun. The distant ships glittered like burnished gold; the little boats near the beach heaved on the ebbing tide, inviting occupants. The view was grand beyond description. Anne was drawn in her easy-chair to the window, to enjoy the scene with us. Her face became illumined almost as much as the

glorious scene she gazed upon. Little was said, for it was plain that her thoughts were driven by the imposing view before her to penetrate forwards to the regions of unfading glory. She again thought of public worship, and wished us to leave her, and join those who were assembled at the House of God. We declined, gently urging the duty and pleasure of staying with her, who was now so dear and so feeble. On returning to her place near the fire, she conversed with her sister upon the propriety of returning to their home. She did not wish it for her own sake, she said: she was fearing others might suffer more if her decease occurred where she was. She probably thought the task of accompanying her lifeless remains on a long journey was more than her sister could bear—more than the bereaved father could bear, were she borne home another, and a third tenant, of the family-vault in the short space of nine months.

“The night was passed without any apparent accession of illness. She rose at seven o’clock, and performed most of her toilet herself, by her expressed wish. Her sister always yielded such points, believing it was the truest kindness not to press inability when it was not acknowledged. Nothing occurred to excite alarm till about 11 A.M. She then spoke of feeling a change. ‘She believed she had not long to live. Could she reach home alive, if we prepared immediately for departure?’ A physician was sent for. Her address to him was made with perfect composure. She begged him to say’How long he thought she might live;—not to fear speaking the truth, for she was not afraid to die.‘ The doctor reluctantly admitted that the angel of death was already arrived, and that life was ebbing fast. She thanked him for his truthfulness, and he departed to come again very soon. She still occupied her easy-chair, looking so serene, so reliant: there was no opening for grief as yet, though all knew the separation was at hand. She clasped her hands, and reverently invoked a blessing from on high; first upon her sister, then upon her friend, to whom she said, ‘Be a sister in my stead. Give Charlotte as much of your company as you can.’ She then thanked each for her kindness and attention.

“Ere long the restlessness of approaching death appeared, and she was borne to the sofa; on being asked if she were easier, she looked gratefully at her questioner, and said, ‘It is not you who can give me ease, but soon all will be well, through the merits of our Redeemer.’ Shortly after this, seeing

that her sister could hardly restrain her grief, she said, ‘Take courage, Charlotte; take courage.’ Her faith never failed, and her eye never dimmed till about two o‘clock, when she calmly and without a sigh passed from the temporal to the eternal. So still, and so hallowed were her last hours and moments. There was no thought of assistance or of dread. The doctor came and went two or three times. The hostess knew that death was near, yet so little was the house disturbed by the presence of the dying, and the sorrow of those so nearly bereaved, that dinner was announced as ready, through the half-opened door, as the living sister was closing the eyes of the dead one. She could now no more stay the welled-up grief of her sister with her emphatic and dying ‘Take courage,’ and it burst forth in brief but agonizing strength. Charlotte’s affection, however, had another channel, and there it turned in thought, in care, and in tenderness. There was bereavement, but there was not solitude;—sympathy was at hand, and it was accepted. With calmness, came the consideration of the removal of the dear remains to their home resting-place. This melancholy task, however, was never performed; for the afflicted sister decided to lay the flower in the place where it had fallen. She believed that to do so would accord with the wishes of the departed. She had no preference for place. She thought not of the grave, for that is but the body’s goal, but of all that is beyond it.

“Her remains rest,

‘Where the south sun warms the now dear sod, ‘Where the ocean billows lave and strike the steep and turf-covered rock.’ ”

Anne died on the Monday. On the Tuesday Charlotte wrote to her father; but, knowing that his presence was required for some annual Church solemnity at Haworth, she informed him that she had made all necessary arrangements for the interment, and that the funeral would take place so soon, that he could hardly arrive in time for it. The surgeon who had visited Anne on the day of her death, offered his attendance, but it was respectfully declined.

Mr. Brontë wrote to urge Charlotte’s longer stay at the sea-side. Her health and spirits were sorely shaken; and much as he naturally longed to see his only remaining child, he felt it right to persuade her to take, with her friend, a few more weeks’ change of scene,—though even that could not

bring change of thought. Late in June the friends returned homewards,—parting rather suddenly (it would seem) from each other, when their paths diverged.

"July 1849.

"I intended to have written a line to you to-day, if I had not received yours. We did indeed part suddenly; it made my heart ache that we were severed without the time to exchange a word; and yet perhaps it was better. I got here a little before eight o'clock. All was clean and bright waiting for me. Papa and the servants were well; and all received me with an affection which should have consoled. The dogs seemed in strange ecstasy. I am certain they regarded me as the harbinger of others. The dumb creatures thought that as I was returned, those who had been so long absent were not far behind.

"I left Papa soon, and went into the dining-room: I shut the door—I tried to be glad that I was come home. I have always been glad before—except once—even then I was cheered. But this time joy was not to be the sensation. I felt that the house was all silent—the rooms were all empty. I remembered where the three were laid—in what narrow dark dwellings—never more to reappear on earth. So the sense of desolation and bitterness took possession of me. The agony that was to be undergone, and was not to be avoided, came on. I underwent it, and passed a dreary evening and night, and a mournful morrow; to-day I am better.

"I do not know how life will pass, but I certainly do feel confidence in Him who has upheld me hitherto. Solitude may be cheered, and made endurable beyond what I can believe. The great trial is when evening closes and night approaches. At that hour we used to assemble in the dining-room—we used to talk. Now I sit by myself—necessarily I am silent. I cannot help thinking of their last days, remembering their sufferings, and what they said and did, and how they looked in mortal affliction. Perhaps all this will become less poignant in time.

"Let me thank you once more, dear E—, for your kindness to me, which I do not mean to forget. How did you think all looking at your home? Papa thought me a little stronger; he said my eyes were not so sunken."

“July 14th, 1849.

“I do not much like giving an account of myself I like better to go out of myself, and talk of something more cheerful. My cold, wherever I got it, whether at Easton or elsewhere, is not vanished yet. It began in my head, then I had a sore throat, and then a sore chest, with a cough, but only a trifling cough, which I still have at times. The pain between my shoulders likewise amazed me much. Say nothing about it, for I confess I am too much disposed to be nervous. This nervousness is a horrid phantom. I dare communicate no ailment to Papa; his anxiety harasses me inexpressibly.

“My life is what I expected it to be. Sometimes when I wake in the morning, and know that Solitude, Remembrance, and Longing are to be almost my sole companions all day through—that at night I shall go to bed with them, that they will long keep me sleepless—that next morning I shall wake to them again,—sometimes, Nell, I have a heavy heart of it. But crushed I am not, yet; nor robbed of elasticity, nor of hope, nor quite of endeavour. I have some strength to fight the battle of life. I am aware, and can acknowledge, I have many comforts, many mercies. Still I can *get* on. But I do hope and pray, that never may you, or any one I love, be placed as I am. To sit in a lonely room—the clock ticking loud through a still house—and have open before the mind’s eye the record of the last year, with its shocks, sufferings, losses—is a trial.

“I write to you freely, because I believe you will hear me with moderation—that you will not take alarm or think me in any way worse off than I am.”

CHAPTER IV.

The tale of “Shirley” had been begun soon after the publication of “Jane Eyre.” If the reader will refer to the account I have given of Miss Brontë’s school-days at Roe Head, he will there see how every place surrounding that house was connected with the Luddite riots, and will learn how stories and anecdotes of that time were rife among the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages; how Miss Wooler herself, and the elder relations of most of her schoolfellows, must have known the actors in those grim disturbances. What Charlotte had heard there as a girl came up in her mind when, as a woman, she sought a subject for her next work; and she sent to Leeds for a file of the “Mercuries” of 1812, ’ 13, and 14; in order to understand the spirit of those eventful times. She was anxious to write of things she had known and seen; and among the number was the West Yorkshire character, for which any tale laid among the Luddites would afford full scope. In “Shirley” she took the idea of most of her characters from life, although the incidents and situations were, of course, fictitious. She thought that if these last were purely imaginary, she might draw from the real without detection, but in this she was mistaken; her studies were too closely accurate. This occasionally led her into difficulties. People recognised themselves, or were recognised by others, in her graphic descriptions of their personal appearance, and modes of action and turns of thought; though they were placed in new positions, and figured away in scenes far different to those in which their actual life had been passed. Miss Brontë was struck by the force or peculiarity of the character of some one whom she knew; she studied it, and analysed it with subtle power; and having traced it to its germ, she took that germ as the nucleus of an imaginary character, and worked outwards; —thus reversing the process of analysation, and unconsciously reproducing the same external development.

The “three curates”[1] were real living men, haunting Haworth and the neighbouring district; and so obtuse in perception that, after the first burst of anger at having their ways and habits chronicled was over, they rather enjoyed the joke of calling each other by the names she had given them.

“Mrs. Pryor” was well known to many who loved the original dearly.[ar] The whole family of the Yorkes[as] were, I have been assured, almost daguerreotypes. ‡ Indeed, Miss Brontë told me that, before publication, she had sent those parts of the novel in which these remarkable persons are introduced, to one of the sons; and his reply, after reading it, was simply that “she had not drawn them strong enough.” From those many-sided sons, I suspect, she drew all that there was of truth in the characters of the heroes in her first two works. They, indeed, were almost the only young men she knew intimately, besides her brother. There was much friendship, and still more confidence between the Brontë family and them,—although their intercourse was often broken and irregular. There was never any warmer feeling on either side.

The character of Shirley herself, is Charlotte’s representation of Emily. I mention this, because all that I, a stranger, have been able to learn about her has not tended to give either me, or my readers, a pleasant impression of her. But we must remember how little we are acquainted with her, compared to that sister, who, out of her more intimate knowledge, says that she “was genuinely good, and truly great,” and who tried to depict her character in Shirley Keeldar, as what Emily Brontë would have been, had she been placed in health and prosperity.

Miss Brontë took extreme pains with “Shirley.” She felt that the fame she had acquired imposed upon her a double responsibility She tried to make her novel like a piece of actual life,—feeling sure that, if she but represented the product of personal experience and observation truly, good would come out of it in the long run. She carefully studied the different reviews and criticisms that had appeared on “Jane Eyre,” in hopes of extracting precepts and advice from which to profit.

Down into the very midst of her writing came the bolts of death. She had nearly finished the second volume of her tale when Branwell died,—after him Emily,—after her Anne;—the pen, laid down when there were three sisters living and loving, was taken up when one alone remained. Well might she call the first chapter that she wrote after this, “The Valley of the Shadow of Death.”

I knew in part what the unknown author of “Shirley” must have suffered, when I read those pathetic words which occur at the end of this and the beginning of the succeeding chapter:—

“Till break of day, she wrestled with God in earnest prayer.

“Not always do those who dare such divine conflict prevail. Night after night the sweat of agony may burst dark on the forehead; the supplicant may cry for mercy with that soundless voice the soul utters when its appeal is to the Invisible.‘Spare my beloved,’ it may implore. ‘Heal my life’s life. Rend not from me what long affection entwines with my whole nature. God of heaven—bend—hear—be clement!’ And after this cry and strife, the sun may rise and see him worsted. That opening morn, which used to salute him with the whispers of zephyrs, the carol of skylarks, may breathe, as its first accents, from the dear lips which colour and heat have quitted,—‘Oh! I have had a suffering night. This morning I am worse. I have tried to rise. I cannot. Dreams I am unused to, have troubled me.’

“Then the watcher approaches the patient’s pillow, and sees a new and strange moulding of the familiar features, feels at once that the insufferable moment draws nigh, knows that it is God’s will his idol should be broken, and bends his head, and subdues his soul to the sentence he cannot avert, and scarce can bear.....

“No piteous, unconscious moaning sound—which so wastes our strength that, even if we have sworn to be firm, a rush of unconquerable tears sweeps away the oath—preceded her waking. No space of deaf apathy followed. The first words spoken were not those of one becoming estranged from this world, and already permitted to stray at times into realms foreign to the living.”

She went on with her work steadily. But it was dreary to write without any one to listen to the progress of her tale,—to find fault or to sympathise,—while pacing the length of the parlour in the evenings, as in the days that were no more. Three sisters had done this,—then two, the other sister dropping off from the walk,—and now one was left desolate, to listen for echoing steps that never came,—and to hear the wind sobbing at the windows, with an almost articulate sound.

But she wrote on, struggling against her own feelings of illness; “continually recurring feelings of slight cold; slight soreness in the throat and chest, of which, do what I will,” she writes, “I cannot get rid.”

In August there arose a new cause for anxiety, happily but temporary.

“Aug. 23rd, 1849.

“Papa has not been well at all lately. He has had another attack of bronchitis. I felt very uneasy about him for some days—more wretched indeed than I care to tell you. After what has happened, one trembles at any appearance of sickness; and when anything ails Papa, I feel too keenly that he is the last—the only near and dear relative I have in the world. Yesterday and to-day he has seemed much better, for which I am truly thankful.....

“From what you say of Mr.—, I think I should like him very much.—wants shaking to be put out about his appearance. What does it matter whether her husband dines in a dress-coat or a market-coat, provided there be worth, and honesty, and a clean shirt underneath?”

“Sept. 10th, 1849.

“My piece of work is at last finished, and despatched to its destination. You must now tell me when there is a chance of your being able to come here. I fear it will now be difficult to arrange, as it is so near the marriage-day. Note well, it would spoil all my pleasure, if you put yourself or any one else to inconvenience to come to Haworth. But when it is convenient, I shall be truly glad to see you.... Papa, I am thankful to say, is better, though not strong. He is often troubled with a sensation of nausea. My cold is very much less troublesome, I am sometimes quite free from it. A few days since, I had a severe bilious attack, the consequence of sitting too closely to my writing; but it is gone now. It is the first from which I have suffered since my return from the sea-side. I had them every month before.”

“Sept 13th, 1849.

“If duty and the well-being of others require that you should stay at home, I cannot permit myself to complain, still, I am very, very sorry that

circumstances will not permit us to meet just now. I would without hesitation come to—, if Papa were stronger; but uncertain as are both his health and spirits, I could not possibly prevail on myself to leave him now. Let us hope that when we do see each other, our meeting will be all the more pleasurable for being delayed. Dear E—, you certainly have a heavy burden laid on your shoulders, but such burdens, if well borne, benefit the character; only we must take the *greatest, closest, most watchful* care not to grow proud of our strength, in case we should be enabled to bear up under the trial. That pride, indeed, would be a sign of radical weakness. The strength, if strength we have, is certainly never in our own selves; it is given us."

To W.S. Williams, Esq.

"Sept. 21st, 1849.

"My dear Sir,—I am obliged to you for preserving my secret, being at least as anxious as ever *(more* anxious I can not well be) to keep quiet. You asked me in one of your letters lately, whether I thought I should escape identification in Yorkshire. I am so little known, that I think I shall. Besides, the book is far less founded on the Real, than perhaps appears. It would be difficult to explain to you how little actual experience I have had of life, how few persons I have known, and how very few have known me.

"As an instance how the characters have been managed, take that of Mr. Helstone.[at] If this character had an original, it was in the person of a clergyman who died some years since at the advanced age of eighty. I never saw him except once—at the consecration of a church—when I was a child of ten years old. I was then struck with his appearance, and stern, martial air. At a subsequent period, I heard him talked about in the neighbourhood where he had resided: some mention him with enthusiasm—others with detestation. I listened to various anecdotes, balanced evidence against evidence, and drew an inference. The original of Mr. Hall[2] I have seen; he knows me slightly; but he would as soon think I had closely observed him or taken him for a character—he would as soon, indeed, suspect me of writing a book—a novel—as he would his dog, Prince. Margaret Hall[au]

called ‘Jane Eyre’ a ‘wicked book,’ on the authority of the ‘uarterly;’ an expression which, coming from her, I will here confess, struck somewhat deep. It opened my eyes to the harm the ‘Quarterly’ had done. Margaret would not have called it ‘wicked,’ if she had not been told so.

“No matter,—whether known or unknown—misjudged, or the contrary,—I am resolved not to write otherwise. I shall bend as my powers tend. The two human beings who understood me, and whom I understood, are gone: I have some that love me yet, and whom I love, without expecting, or having a right to expect, that they shall perfectly understand me. I am satisfied; but I must have my own way in the matter of writing. The loss of what we possess nearest and dearest to us in this world, produces an effect upon the character: we search out what we have yet left that can support, and, when found, we cling to it with a hold of newstrung tenacity. The faculty of imagination lifted me when I was sinking, three months ago; its active exercise has kept my head above water since; its results cheer me now, for I feel they have enabled me to give pleasure to others. I am thankful to God, who gave me the faculty; and it is for me a part of my religion to defend this gift, and to profit by its possession. Yours sincerely,

“CHARLOTTE BRONTË.”

At the time when this letter was written, both Tabby and the young servant whom they had to assist her were ill in bed; and, with the exception of occasional aid, Miss Brontë had all the household work to perform, as well as to nurse the two invalids.

The serious illness of the younger servant was at its height, when a cry from Tabby called Miss Brontë into the kitchen, and she found the poor old woman of eighty laid on the floor, with her head under the kitchen-grate; she had fallen from her chair in attempting to rise. When I saw her, two years later, she described to me the tender care which Charlotte had taken of her at this time; and wound up her account of “how her own mother could not have had more thought for her nor Miss Brontë had,” by saying, “Eh! she’s a good one—she is!”

But there was one day when the strung nerves gave way—when, as she says, “I fairly broke down for ten minutes; sat and cried like a fool. Tabby

could neither stand nor walk. Papa had just been declaring that Martha was in imminent danger. I was myself depressed with headache and sickness. That day I hardly knew what to do, or where to turn. Thank God! Martha is now convalescent: Tabby, I trust, will be better soon. Papa is pretty well. I have the satisfaction of knowing that my publishers are delighted with what I sent them. This supports me. But life is a battle. May we all be enabled to fight it well!”

The kind friend, to whom she thus wrote, saw how the poor over-taxed system needed bracing, and accordingly sent her a shower-bath—a thing for which she had long been wishing. The receipt of it was acknowledged as follows:—

“Sept. 28th, 1849.

“... Martha is now almost well, and Tabby much better. A huge monster-package, from ‘Nelson, Leeds,’ came yesterday. You want chastising roundly and soundly. Such are the thanks you get for all your trouble.... Whenever you come to Haworth, you shall certainly have a thorough drenching in your own shower-bath. I have not yet unpacked the wretch.—Yours, as you deserve,

“C. B.”

There was misfortune of another kind impending over her. There were some railway shares, which, so early as 1846, she had told Miss Wooler she wished to sell, but had kept because she could not persuade her sisters to look upon the affair as she did, and so preferred running the risk of loss, to hurting Emily’s feelings by acting in opposition to her opinion. The depreciation of these same shares was now verifying Charlotte’s soundness of judgment. They were in the York and North-Midland Company, which was one of Mr. Hudson’s pet lines and had the full benefit of his peculiar system of management. She applied to her friend and publisher, Mr. Smith, for information on the subject; and the following letter is in answer to his reply:—

“Oct. 4th, 1849.

“My dear Sir,—I must not thank you for, but acknowledge the receipt of your letter. The business is certainly very bad; worse than I thought, and much worse than my father has any idea of. In fact, the little railway property I possessed, according to original prices, formed already a small competency for me, with my views and habits. Now, scarcely any portion of it can, with security, be calculated upon. I must open this view of the case to my father by degrees; and, meanwhile wait patiently till I see how affairs are likely to turn..... However the matter may terminate, I ought perhaps to be rather thankful than dissatisfied. When I look at my own case, and compare it with that of thousands besides, I scarcely see room for a murmur. Many, very many, are by the late strange railway system deprived almost of their daily bread. Such then as have only lost provision laid up for the future, should take care how they complain. The thought that ‘Shirley’ has given pleasure at Cornhill, yields me much quiet comfort. No doubt, however, you are, as I am, prepared for critical severity; but I have good hopes that the vessel is sufficiently sound of construction to weather a gale or two, and to make a prosperous voyage for you in the end.”

Towards the close of October in this year, she went to pay a visit to her friend; but her enjoyment in the holiday, which she had so long promised herself when her work was completed, was deadened by a continual feeling of ill health; either the change of air or the foggy weather produced constant irritation at the chest. Moreover, she was anxious about the impression which her second work would produce on the public mind. For obvious reasons, an author is more susceptible to opinions pronounced on the book which follows a great success, than he has ever been before. Whatever be the value of fame, he has it in his possession, and is not willing to have it dimmed or lost.

“Shirley” was published on October 26th.

When it came out, but before reading it, Mr. Lewes wrote to tell her of his intention of reviewing it in the “Edinburgh.” Her correspondence with him had ceased for some time: much had occurred since.

To G. H. Lewes, Esq.

Nov. 1 st, 1849.

“My dear Sir,—It is about a year and a half since you wrote to me; but it seems a longer period, because since then it has been my lot to pass some black milestones in the journey of life. Since then there have been intervals when I have ceased to care about literature and critics and fame; when I have lost sight of whatever was prominent in my thoughts at the first publication of ‘Jane Eyre;’ but now I want these things to come back vividly, if possible: consequently, it was a pleasure to receive your note. I wish you did not think me a woman. I wish all reviewers believed ‘Currer Bell’ to be a man; they would be more just to him. You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex; where I am not what you consider graceful, you will condemn me. All mouths will be open against that first chapter; and that first chapter is true as the Bible, nor is it exceptionable. Come what will, I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and of what is elegant and charming in feminity; it is not on those terms, or with such ideas, I ever took pen in hand: and if it is only on such terms my writing will be tolerated, I shall pass away from the public and trouble it no more. Out of obscurity I came, to obscurity I can easily return. Standing afar off, I now watch to see what will become of ‘Shirley’ My expectations are very low, and my anticipations somewhat sad and bitter; still, I earnestly conjure you to say honestly what you think; flattery would be worse than vain; there is no consolation in flattery. As for condemnation I cannot, on reflection, see why I should much fear it; there is no one but myself to suffer therefrom, and both happiness and suffering in this life soon pass away. Wishing you all success in your Scottish expedition,—I am, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

“C. BELL.”

Miss Brontë, as we have seen, had been as anxious as ever to preserve her incognito in “Shirley.” She even fancied that there were fewer traces of a female pen in it than in “Jane Eyre;” and thus, when the earliest reviews were published, and asserted that the mysterious writer must be a woman, she was much disappointed. She especially disliked the lowering of the standard by which to judge a work of fiction, if it proceeded from a

feminine pen; and praise mingled with pseudo-gallant allusions to her sex, mortified her far more than actual blame.[3]

But the secret, so jealously preserved, was oozing out at last. The publication of “Shirley” seemed to fix the conviction that the writer was an inhabitant of the district where the story was laid. And a clever Haworth man, who had somewhat risen in the world, and gone to settle in Liverpool, read the novel, and was struck with some of the names of places mentioned, and knew the dialect in which parts of it were written. He became convinced that it was the production of some one in Haworth. But he could not imagine who in that village could have written such a work except Miss Brontë. Proud of his conjecture, he divulged the suspicion (which was almost certainty) in the columns of a Liverpool paper; thus the heart of the mystery came slowly creeping out; and a visit to London, which Miss Brontë paid towards the end of the year 1849, made it distinctly known. She had been all along on most happy terms with her publishers; and their kindness had beguiled some of those weary, solitary hours which had so often occurred of late, by sending for her perusal boxes of books more suited to her tastes than any she could procure from the circulating library at Keighley. She often writes such sentences as the following, in her letters to Cornhill:—[4]

“I was indeed very much interested in the books you sent. ‘Eckermann’s Conversations with Goethe,’ ‘Guesses at Truth,’ ‘Friends in Council,’ and the little work on English social life, pleased me particularly, and the last not least. We sometimes take a partiality to books as to characters, not on account of any brilliant intellect or striking peculiarity they boast, but for the sake of something good, delicate, and genuine. I thought that small book the production of a lady, and an amiable, sensible woman, and I liked it. You must not think of selecting any works for me yet; my stock is still far from exhausted.

“I accept your offer respecting the ‘Athenæum;’[av] it is a paper I should like much to see, providing that you can send it without trouble. It shall be punctually returned.”

In a letter to her friend she complains of the feelings of illness from which she was seldom or never free.

"Nov. 16th, 1849.

"You are not to suppose any of the characters in 'Shirley' intended as literal portraits. It would not suit the rules of art, nor of my own feelings, to write in that style. We only suffer reality to *suggest*, never to dictate. The heroines are abstractions, and the heroes also. Qualities I have seen, loved, and admired, are here and there put in as decorative gems, to be preserved in that setting. Since you say you could recognise the originals of all except the heroines, pray whom did you suppose the two Moores to represent? I send you a couple of reviews:[5] the one is in the 'xaminer,' written by Albany Fonblanque, who is called the most brilliant political writer of the day, a man whose dictum is much thought of in London. The other, in the 'Standard of Freedom,' is written by William Howitt, a Quaker! ... I should be pretty well, if it were not for headaches and indigestion. My chest has been better lately."

In consequence of this long-protracted state of languor, headache, and sickness, to which the slightest exposure to cold added sensations of hoarseness and soreness at the chest, she determined to take the evil in time, as much for her father's sake as for her own, and to go up to London and consult some physician there. It was not her first intention to visit anywhere; but the friendly urgency of her publishers prevailed, and it was decided that she was to become the guest of Mr. Smith. Before she went, she wrote two characteristic letters about "Shirley," from which I shall take a few extracts.

"'Shirley' makes her way. The reviews shower in fast.... The best critique which has yet appeared is in the 'Revue des deux Mondes,' a sort of European Cosmopolitan periodical, whose head-quarters are at Paris.[aw] Comparatively few reviewers, even in their praise, evince a just comprehension of the author's meaning. Eugene Forsarde, the reviewer in question, follows Currer Bell through every winding, discerns every point,

discriminates every shade, proves himself master of the subject, and lord of the aim. With that man I would shake hands, if I saw him, I would say, ‘You know me, Monsieur; I shall deem it an honour to know you.’ I could not say so much of the mass of the London critics. Perhaps I could not say so much to five hundred men and women in all the millions of Great Britain. That matters little. My own conscience I satisfy first; and having done that, if I further content and delight a Forsarde, a Fonblanque, and a Thackeray, my ambition has had its ration; it is fed; it lies down for the present satisfied; my faculties have wrought a day’s task, and earned a day’s wages. I am no teacher; to look on me in that light is to mistake me. To teach is not my vocation. What I am, it is useless to say. Those whom it concerns feel and find it out. To all others I wish only to be an obscure, steady-going, private character. To you, dear E—, I wish to be a sincere friend. Give me your faithful regard; I willingly dispense with admiration.”

“Nov. 26th.

“It is like you to pronounce the reviews not good enough, and belongs to that part of your character which will not permit you to bestow unqualified approbation on any dress, decoration, &c., belonging to you. Know that the reviews are superb; and were I dissatisfied with them, I should be a conceited ape. Nothing higher is ever said, *from perfectly disinterested motives*, of any living authors. If all be well, I go to London this week; Wednesday, I think. The dressmaker has done my small matters pretty well, but I wish you could have looked them over, and given a dictum. I insisted on the dresses being made quite plainly.”

At the end of November she went up to the “big Babylon,”[ax] and was immediately plunged into what appeared to her a whirl; for changes, and scenes, and stimulus which would have been a trifle to others, were much to her. As was always the case with strangers, she was a little afraid at first of the family into which she was now received, fancying that the ladies looked on her with a mixture of respect and alarm; but in a few days, if this state of feeling ever existed, her simple, shy, quiet manners, her dainty personal and

household ways, had quite done away with it, and she says that she thinks they begin to like her, and that she likes them much, for “kindness is a potent heartwinner.” She had stipulated that she should not be expected to see many people. The recluse life she had led was the cause of a nervous shrinking from meeting any fresh face, which lasted all her life long. Still, she longed to have an idea of the personal appearance and manners of some of those whose writings or letters had interested her. Mr. Thackeray was accordingly invited to meet her, but it so happened that she had been out for the greater part of the morning, and, in consequence, missed the luncheon hour at her friend’s house. This brought on a severe and depressing headache in one accustomed to the early, regular hours of a Yorkshire Parsonage; besides, the excitement of meeting, hearing, and sitting next a man to whom she looked up with such admiration as she did to the author of “Vanity Fair,” was of itself overpowering to her frail nerves. She writes about this dinner as follows:—

“Dec. 10th, 1849.

“As to being happy, I am under scenes and circumstances of excitement; but I suffer acute pain sometimes,—mental pain, I mean. At the moment Mr. Thackeray presented himself, I was thoroughly faint from inanition, having eaten nothing since a very slight breakfast, and it was then seven o’clock in the evening. Excitement and exhaustion made savage work of me that evening. What he thought of me I cannot tell.”

She told me how difficult she found it, this first time of meeting Mr. Thackeray, to decide whether he was speaking in jest or in earnest, and that she had (she believed) completely misunderstood an inquiry of his, made on the gentlemen’s coming into the drawing-room. He asked her “if she had perceived the secret of their cigars;” to which she replied literally, discovering in a minute afterwards, by the smile on several faces, that he was alluding to a passage in “Jane Eyre.” Her hosts took pleasure in showing her the sights of London. On one of the days which had been set apart for some of these pleasant excursions, a severe review of “Shirley”

was published in the “Times.”[ay] She had heard that her book would be noticed by it, and guessed that there was some particular reason for the care with which her hosts mislaid it on that particular morning. She told them that she was aware why she might not see the paper. Mrs. Smith at once admitted that her conjecture was right, and said that they had wished her to go to the day’s engagement before reading it. But she quietly persisted in her request to be allowed to have the paper. Mrs. Smith took her work, and tried not to observe the countenance, which the other tried to hide between the large sheets; but she could not help becoming aware of tears stealing down the face and dropping on the lap. The first remark Miss Brontë made was to express her fear lest so severe a notice should check the sale of the book, and injuriously affect her publishers. Wounded as she was, her first thought was for others. Later on (I think that very afternoon) Mr. Thackeray called; she suspected (she said) that he came to see how she bore the attack on “Shirley;” but she had recovered her composure, and conversed very quietly with him: he only learnt from the answer to his direct inquiry that she had read the “Times” article. She acquiesced in the recognition of herself as the authoress of “Jane Eyre,” because she perceived that there were some advantages to be derived from dropping her pseudonym. One result was an acquaintance with Miss Martineau.[6] She had sent her the novel just published, with a curious note, in which Currer Bell offered a copy of “Shirley” to Miss Martineau as an acknowledgment of the gratification he had received from her works. From “Deerbrook” he had derived a new and keen pleasure, and experienced a genuine benefit. In his mind “Deerbrook,” &c.

Miss Martineau, in acknowledging this note and the copy of “Shirley,” dated her letter from a friend’s house in the neighbourhood of Mr. Smith’s residence; and when a week or two afterwards, Miss Brontë found how near she was to her correspondent, she wrote, in the name of Currer Bell, to propose a visit to her. Six o’clock, on a certain Sunday afternoon (Dec. 10th),[az] was the time appointed. Miss Martineau’s friends had invited the unknown Currer Bell to their early tea; they were ignorant whether the name was that of a man or a woman; and had had various conjectures as to sex, age, and appearance. Miss Martineau had, indeed, expressed her

private opinion pretty distinctly by beginning her reply, to the professedly masculine note referred to above, with “Dear Madam;” but she had addressed it to “Currer Bell, Esq.” At every ring the eyes of the party turned towards the door. Some stranger (a gentleman, I think) came in; for an instant they fancied he was Currer Bell, and indeed an Esq.; he stayed some time—went away. Another ring; “Miss Brontë” was announced; and in came a young-looking lady, almost child-like in stature,[7] “in a deep mourning dress, neat as a Quaker’s, with her beautiful hair smooth and brown, her fine eyes blazing with meaning, and her sensible face indicating a habit of self-control.” She came,—hesitated one moment at finding four or five people assembled,—then went straight to Miss Martineau with intuitive recognition, and, with the free-masonry of good feeling and gentle breeding, she soon became as one of the family seated round the tea-table; and before she left, she told them, in a simple, touching manner, of her sorrow and isolation, and a foundation was laid for her intimacy with Miss Martineau.

After some discussion on the subject, and a stipulation that she should not be specially introduced to any one, some gentlemen were invited by Mr. Smith to meet her at dinner the evening before she left town. Her natural place would have been at the bottom of the table by her host; and the places of those who were to be her neighbours were arranged accordingly; but, on entering the dining-room, she quickly passed up so as to sit next to the lady of the house, anxious to shelter herself near some one of her own sex. This slight action arose out of the same womanly seeking after protection on every occasion, when there was no moral duty involved in asserting her independence, that made her about this time write as follows: “Mrs.—[ba] watches me very narrowly when surrounded by strangers. She never takes her eye from me. I like the surveillance; it seems to keep guard over me.”

Respecting this particular dinner-party she thus wrote to the Brussels schoolfellow[bb] of former days, whose friendship had been renewed during her present visit to London:—

“The evening after I left you passed better than I expected. Thanks to my substantial lunch and cheering cup of coffee, I was able to wait the eight o’clock dinner with complete resignation, and to endure its length quite

courageously, nor was I too much exhausted to converse; and of this I was glad, for otherwise I know my kind host and hostess would have been much disappointed. There were only seven gentlemen at dinner besides Mr. Smith, but of these five were critics—men more dreaded in the world of letters than you can conceive. I did not know how much their presence and conversation had excited me till they were gone, and the reaction commenced. When I had retired for the night, I wished to sleep—the effort to do so was vain. I could not close my eyes. Night passed, morning came, and I rose without having known a moment's slumber. So utterly worn out was I when I got to Derby, that I was again obliged to stay there all night."

"Dec. 17th.

"Here I am at Haworth once more. I feel as if I had come out of an exciting whirl. Not that the hurry and stimulus would have seemed much to one accustomed to society and change, but to me they were very marked. My strength and spirits too often proved quite insufficient to the demand on their exertions. I used to bear up as long as I possibly could, for, when I flagged, I could see Mr. Smith became disturbed; he always thought that something had been said or done to annoy me—which never once happened, for I met with perfect good breeding even from antagonists—men who had done their best or worst to write me down. I explained to him, over and over again, that my occasional silence was only failure of the power to talk, never of the will.....

"Thackeray is a Titan of mind. His presence and powers impress one deeply in an intellectual sense; I do not see him or know him as a man. All the others are subordinate. I have esteem for some, and, I trust, courtesy for all. I do not, of course, know what they thought of me, but I believe most of them expected me to come out in a more marked, eccentric, striking light. I believe they desired more to admire and more to blame. I felt sufficiently at my ease with all but Thackeray; with him I was fearfully stupid."

She returned to her quiet home, and her noiseless daily duties. Her father had quite enough of the spirit of hero-worship in him to make him take a vivid pleasure in the accounts of what she had heard and whom she had seen. It was on the occasion of one of her visits to London that he had

desired her to obtain a sight of Prince Albert’s armoury, if possible. I am not aware whether she managed to do this; but she went to one or two of the great national armouries in order that she might describe the stern steel harness and glittering swords to her father, whose imagination was forcibly struck by the idea of such things; and often afterwards, when his spirits flagged and the languor of old age for a time got the better of his indomitable nature, she would again strike on the measure wild, and speak about the armies of strange weapons she had seen in London, till he resumed his interest in the old subject, and was his own keen, warlike, intelligent self again.

CHAPTER V.

Her life at Haworth was so unvaried that the postman's call was the event of her day. Yet she dreaded the great temptation of centring all her thoughts upon this one time, and losing her interest in the smaller hopes and employments of the remaining hours. Thus she conscientiously denied herself the pleasure of writing letters too frequently, because the answers (when she received them) took the flavour out of the rest of her life; or the disappointment, when the replies did not arrive, lessened her energy for her home duties.

The winter of this year in the north was hard and cold; it affected Miss Brontë's health less than usual, however, probably because the change and the medical advice she had taken in London had done her good; probably, also, because her friend had come to pay her a visit, and enforced that attention to bodily symptoms which Miss Brontë was too apt to neglect, from a fear of becoming nervous herself about her own state, and thus infecting her father. But she could scarcely help feeling much depressed in spirits as the anniversary of her sister Emily's death came round; all the recollections connected with it were painful, yet there were no outward events to call off her attention, and prevent them from pressing hard upon her. At this time, as at many others, I find her alluding in her letters to the solace which she found in the books sent her from Cornhill.

"What, I sometimes ask, could I do without them? I have recourse to them as to friends; they shorten and cheer many an hour that would be too long and too desolate otherwise; even when my tired sight will not permit me to continue reading, it is pleasant to see them on the shelf, or on the table. I am still very rich, for my stock is far from exhausted. Some other friends have sent me books lately. The perusal of Harriet Martineau's 'Eastern Life' has afforded me great pleasure; and I have found a deep and interesting subject of study in Newman's work on the 'Soul.' Have you read this work? It is daring,—it may be mistaken,—but it is pure and elevated. Froude's

‘Nemesis of Faith’[1] I did not like; I thought it morbid; yet in its pages, too, are found sprinklings of truth.”

By this time, “Airedale, Wharfedale, Calderdale, and Ribblesdale” all knew the place of residence of Currer Bell. She compared herself to the ostrich hiding its head in the sand; and says that she still buries hers in the heath of Haworth moors; but “the concealment is but self-delusion.”

Indeed it was. Far and wide in the West Riding had spread the intelligence that Currer Bell was no other than a daughter of the venerable clergyman of Haworth; the village itself caught up the excitement.

“Mr.—, having finished ‘Jane Eyre,’ is now crying out for the ‘other book;’ he is to have it next week.... Mr. R—has finished

‘Shirley;’ he is delighted with it. John—s wife[2] seriously thought him gone wrong in the head, as she heard him giving vent to roars of laughter as he sat alone, clapping and stamping on the floor. He would read all the scenes about the curates aloud to papa.” ... ”Martha came in yesterday, puffing and blowing, and much excited. ‘I’ve heard sich news!’ she began. ‘What about?’ ‘Please, ma’am, you’ve been and written two books—the grandest books that ever was seen. My father has heard it at Halifax, and Mr. G—T—and Mr. G—and Mr. M—at Bradford; and they are going to have a meeting at the Mechanics’ Institute, and to settle about ordering them.’ ‘Hold your tongue, Martha, and be off’ I fell into a cold sweat. ‘Jane Eyre’ will be read by J—B—, by Mrs.T—, and B—. Heaven help, keep, and deliver me! “ ... ”The Haworth people have been making great fools of themselves about ’Shirley;‘ they have taken it in an enthusiastic light. When they got the volumes at the Mechanics’ Institute,[3] all the members wanted them. They cast lots for the whole three, and whoever got a volume was only allowed to keep it two days, and was to be fined a shilling per diem for longer detention. It would be mere nonsense and vanity to tell you what they say.”

The tone of these extracts is thoroughly consonant with the spirit ofYorkshire and Lancashire people, who try as long as they can to conceal their emotions of pleasure under a bantering exterior, almost as if making fun of themselves.—Miss Brontë was extremely touched in the secret places of her warm heart by the way in which those who had known her from her childhood were proud and glad of her success. All round about the news had spread; strangers came “from beyond Bromley” to see her, as she went quietly and unconsciously into church; and the sexton “gained many a half-crown” for pointing her out.

But there were drawbacks to this hearty and kindly appreciation which was so much more valuable than fame. The January number of the “Edinburgh Review” had contained the article on “Shirley,” of which her correspondent, Mr. Lewes, was the writer. I have said that Miss Brontë was especially anxious to be criticised as a writer, without relation to her sex as a woman. Whether right or wrong, her feeling was strong on this point. Now in this review of “Shirley,” the headings of the first two pages ran thus: “Mental Equality of the Sexes?” “Female Literature,” and through the whole article the fact of the author’s sex is never forgotten.

A few days after the review appeared, Mr. Lewes received the following note,—rather in the style of Anne, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset, and Montgomery.

To G. H. Lewes, Esq.

“I can be on my guard against my enemies, but God deliver me from my friends!

“CURRER BELL.”

In some explanatory notes on her letters to him, with which Mr. Lewes has favoured me, he says:—

“Seeing that she was unreasonable because angry, I wrote to remonstrate with her on quarrelling with the severity or frankness of a review, which

certainly was dictated by real admiration and real friendship; even under its objections the friend's voice could be heard."

The following letter is her reply:—

To G. H. Lewes, Esq.

"Jan. 19 th, 1850.

"My dear Sir,—I will tell you why I was so hurt by that review in the 'Edinburgh'; not because its criticism was keen or its blame sometimes severe; not because its praise was stinted (for, indeed, I think you give me quite as much praise as I deserve), but because after I had said earnestly that I wished critics would judge me as an *author,* not as a woman, you so roughly—I even thought so cruelly—handled the question of sex. I dare say you meant no harm, and perhaps you will not now be able to understand why I was so grieved at what you will probably deem such a trifle; but grieved I was, and indignant too.

"There was a passage or two which you did quite wrong to write.

"However, I will not bear malice against you for it; I know what your nature is; it is not a bad or unkind one, though you would often jar terribly on some feelings with whose recoil and quiver you could not possibly sympathise. I imagine you are both enthusiastic and implacable, as you are at once sagacious and careless; you know much and discover much, but you are in such a hurry to tell it all you never give yourself time to think how your reckless eloquence may affect others; and, what is more, if you knew how it did affect them, you would not much care.

"However, I shake hands with you; you have excellent points; you can be generous. I still feel angry, and think I do well to be angry; but it is the anger one experiences for rough play rather than for foul play.—I am yours, with a certain respect, and more chagrin,

"CURRER BELL."

As Mr. Lewes says, “the tone of this letter is cavalier.” But I thank him for having allowed me to publish what is so characteristic of one phase of Miss Brontë’s mind. Her health, too, was suffering at this time. “I don’t know what heaviness of spirit has beset me of late,” (she writes, in pathetic words, wrung out of the sadness of her heart,) “made my faculties dull, made rest weariness, and occupation burdensome. Now and then, the silence of the house, the solitude of the room, has pressed on me with a weight I found it difficult to bear, and recollection has not failed to be as alert, poignant, obtrusive, as other feelings were languid. I attribute this state of things partly to the weather. Quicksilver invariably falls low in storms and high winds, and I have ere this been warned of approaching disturbance in the atmosphere by a sense of bodily weakness, and deep, heavy mental sadness, such as some would call *presentiment*,—presentiment indeed it is, but not at all supernatural..... I cannot help feeling something of the excitement of expectation till the post hour comes, and when, day after day, it brings nothing, I get low. This is a stupid, disgraceful, un-meaning state of things. I feel bitterly vexed at my own dependence and folly; but it is so bad for the mind to be quite alone, and to have none with whom to talk over little crosses and disappointments, and to laugh them away. If I could write, I dare say I should be better, but I cannot write a line. However (by God’s help), I will contend against this folly.

“I had rather a foolish letter the other day from—.[bc] Some things in it nettled me, especially an unnecessarily earnest assurance that, in spite of all I had done in the writing line, I still retained a place in her esteem. My answer took strong and high ground at once. I said I had been troubled by no doubts on the subject; that I neither did her nor myself the injustice to suppose there was anything in what I had written to incur the just forfeiture of esteem.....

“A few days since, a little incident happened which curiously touched me. Papa put into my hands a little packet of letters and papers,—telling me that they were mamma’s and that I might read them. I did read them, in a frame of mind I cannot describe. The papers were yellow with time, all having been written before I was born: it was strange now to peruse, for the first

time, the records of a mind whence my own sprang; and most strange, and at once sad and sweet, to find that mind of a truly fine, pure, and elevated order. They were written to papa before they were married. There is a rectitude, a refinement, a constancy, a modesty, a sense, a gentleness about them indescribable. I wished that she had lived, and that I had known her.... All through this month of February, I have had a crushing time of it. I could not escape from or rise above certain most mournful recollections,—the last days, the sufferings, the remembered words—most sorrowful to me, of those who, Faith assures me, are now happy. At evening and bed-time, such thoughts would haunt me, bringing a weary heartache."

The reader may remember the strange prophetic vision, which dictated a few words, written on the occasion of the death of a pupil of hers in January, 1840:

"Wherever I seek for her now in this world, she cannot be found; no more than a flower or a leaf which withered twenty years ago. A bereavement of this kind gives one a glimpse of the feeling those must have, who have seen all drop round them—friend after friend, and are left to end their pilgrimage alone."

Even in persons of naturally robust health, and with no to wear, with slow dropping but perpetual pain, upon their spirits, the nerves and appetite will give way in solitude. How much more must it have been so with Miss Brontë, delicate and frail in constitution, tried by much anxiety and sorrow in early life, and now left to face her life alone! Owing to Mr. Brontë's great age, and long formed habits of solitary occupation when in the house, his daughter was left to herself for the greater part of the day. Ever since his serious attacks of illness, he had dined alone; a portion of her dinner, regulated by strict attention to the diet most suitable for him, being taken into his room by herself After dinner she read to him for an hour or so, as his sight was too weak to allow of his reading long to himself He was out of doors among his parishioners for a good part of each day; often for a longer

time than his strength would permit. Yet he always liked to go alone, and consequently her affectionate care could be no check upon the length of his walks to the more distant hamlets which were in his cure. He would come back occasionally utterly fatigued; and be obliged to go to bed, questioning himself sadly as to where all his former strength of body had gone to. His strength of will was the same as ever. That which he resolved to do he did, at whatever cost of weariness; but his daughter was all the more anxious from seeing him so regardless of himself and his health. The hours of retiring for the night had always been early in the Parsonage; now family prayers were at eight o'clock; directly after which Mr. Brontë and old Tabby went to bed, and Martha was not long in following. But Charlotte could not have slept if she had gone,—could not have rested on her desolate couch. She stopped up,—it was very tempting,—late and later; striving to beguile the lonely night with some employment, till her weak eyes failed to read or to sew, and could only weep in solitude over the dead that were not. No one on earth can even imagine what those hours were to her. All the grim superstitions of the North had been implanted in her during her childhood by the servants, who believed in them. They recurred to her now, —with no shrinking from the spirits of the Dead, but with such an intense longing once more to stand face to face with the souls of her sisters as no one but she could have felt. It seemed as if the very strength of her yearning should have compelled them to appear. On windy nights, cries, and sobs, and wailings seemed to go round the house, as of the dearly-beloved striving to force their way to her. Some one conversing with her once objected, in my presence, to that part of "Jane Eyre" in which she hears Rochester's voice crying out to her in a great crisis of her life, he being many, many miles distant at the time. I do not know what incident was in Miss Brontë's recollection when she replied, in a low voice, drawing in her breath, "But it is a true thing; it really happened."

"Ricordarsi di tempo felice Nella miseria—"[4]

The reader, who has even faintly pictured to himself her life at this time, —the solitary days,—the waking, watching nights,—may imagine to what a sensitive pitch her nerves were strung, and how such a state was sure to affect her health.

It was no bad thing for her that about this time various people began to go over to Haworth, curious to see the scenery described in “Shirley,” if a sympathy with the writer, of a more generous kind than to be called mere curiosity, did not make them wish to know whether they could not in some way serve or cheer one who had suffered so deeply.

Among this number were Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth. [5] Their house lies over the crest of the moors which rise above Haworth, at about a dozen miles’ distance as the crow flies, though much further by the road. But, according to the acceptation of the word in that uninhabited district, they were neighbours, if they so willed it. Accordingly, Sir James and his wife drove over one morning, at the beginning of March, to call upon Miss Brontë and her father. Before taking leave, they pressed her to visit them at Gawthorpe Hall, their residence on the borders of East Lancashire. After some hesitation, and at the urgency of her father, who was extremely anxious to procure for her any change of scene and society that was offered, she consented to go. On the whole, she enjoyed her visit very much, in spite of her shyness, and the difficulty she always experienced in meeting the advances of those strangers whose kindness she did not feel herself in a position to repay.

She took great pleasure in the “quiet drives to old ruins and old halls, situated among older hills and woods; the dialogues by the old fireside in the antique oak-panelled drawing-room, while they suited him, did not too much oppress and exhaust me. The house, too, is much to my taste; near three centuries old, grey, stately, and picturesque. On the whole, now that the visit is over, I do not regret having paid it. The worst of it is, that there is now some menace hanging over my head of an invitation to go to them in London during the season. This, which would be a great enjoyment to some people, is a perfect terror to me. I should highly prize the advantages to be gained in an extended range of observation; but I tremble at the thought of the price I must necessarily pay in mental distress and physical wear and tear.”

On the same day on which she wrote the above, she sent the following letter to Mr. Smith.

“March 16th, 1850.

“I return Mr. H—’s note, after reading it carefully. I tried very hard to understand all he says about art; but, to speak truth, my efforts were crowned with incomplete success. There is a certain jargon in use amongst critics on this point through which it is physically and morally impossible to me to see daylight. One thing, however, I see plainly enough, and that is, Mr. Currer Bell needs improvement, and ought to strive after it; and this (D. V) he honestly intends to do—taking his time, however, and following as his guides Nature and Truth. If these lead to what the critics call art, it is all very well; but if not, that grand desideratum has no chance of being run after or caught. The puzzle is, that while the people of the South object to my delineation of Northern life and manners, the people of Yorkshire and Lancashire approve. They say it is precisely the contrast of rough nature with highly artificial cultivation which forms one of their main characteristics. Such, or something very similar, has been the observation made to me lately, whilst I have been from home, by members of some of the ancient East Lancashire families, whose mansions he on the hilly border-land between the two counties. The question arises, whether do the London critics, or the old Northern squires, understand the matter best?

“Any promise you require respecting the books shall be willingly given, provided only I am allowed the Jesuit’s principle of a mental reservation, giving licence to forget and promise whenever oblivion shall appear expedient. The last two or three numbers of ‘Pendennis’[bd] will not, I dare say be generally thought sufficiently exciting, yet I like them. Though the story lingers, (for me) the interest does not flag. Here and there we feel that the pen has been guided by a tired hand, that the mind of the writer has been somewhat chafed and depressed by his recent illness, or by some other cause; but Thackeray still proves himself greater when he is weary than other writers are when they are fresh. The public, of course, will have no compassion for his fatigue, and make no allowance for the ebb of inspiration; but some true-hearted readers here and there, while grieving that such a man should be obliged to write when he is not in the mood, will wonder that, under such circumstances, he should write so well. The parcel of books will come, I doubt not, at such time as it shall suit the good pleasure of the railway officials to send it on,—or rather to yield it up to the

repeated and humble solicitations of Haworth carriers; till then I wait in all reasonable patience and resignation, looking with docility to that model of active self-helpfulness ‘Punch’ friendly offers the ‘Women of England,’ in his ‘Unprotected Female.’ ”[6]

The books lent her by her publishers were, as I have before said, a great solace and pleasure to her. There was much interest in opening the Cornhill parcel. But there was pain too; for, as she untied the cords, and took out the volumes one by one, she could scarcely fail to be reminded of those who once, on similar occasions, looked on so eagerly. “I miss familiar voices, commenting mirthfully and pleasantly; the room seems very still—very empty; but yet there is consolation in remembering that Papa will take pleasure in some of the books. Happiness quite unshared can scarcely be called happiness; it has no taste.” She goes on to make remarks upon the kind of books sent.

“I wonder how you can choose so well; on no account would I forestall the choice. I am sure any selection I might make for myself would be less satisfactory than the selection others so kindly and judiciously make for me; besides, if I knew all that was coming, it would be comparatively flat. I would much rather not know.

“Amongst the especially welcome works are ‘Southey’s Life,’ the ‘Women of France,’ Hazlitt’s ‘Essays,’ Emerson’s ‘Representative Men;’ but it seems invidious to particularize when all are good..... I took up a second small book, Scott’s ‘Suggestions on Female Education;’ that, too, I read, and with unalloyed pleasure.[7] It is very good; justly thought, and clearly and felicitously expressed. The girls of this generation have great advantages; it seems to me that they receive much encouragement in the acquisition of knowledge, and the cultivation of their minds; in these days, women may be thoughtful and well read, without being universally stigmatised as ‘Blues’ and ‘Pedants.’ Men begin to approve and aid, instead of ridiculing or checking them in their efforts to be wise. I must say that, for my own part, whenever I have been so happy as to share the conversation of

a really intellectual man, my feeling has been, not that the little I knew was accounted a superfluity and impertinence, but that I did not know enough to satisfy just expectation. I have always to explain, ‘In me you must not look for great attainments: what seems to you the result of reading and study, is chiefly spontaneous and intuitive.’ .... Against the teaching of some (even clever) men, one instinctively revolts. They may possess attainments, they may boast varied knowledge of life and of the world; but if of the finer perceptions, of the more delicate phases of feeling, they be destitute and incapable, of what avail is the rest? Believe me, while hints well worth consideration may come from unpretending sources, from minds not highly cultured, but naturally fine and delicate, from hearts kindly, feeling, and unenvious, learned dictums delivered with pomp and sound may be perfectly empty, stupid, and contemptible. No man ever yet ‘by aid of Greek climbed Parnassus,’ or taught others to climb it....

I enclose for your perusal a scrap of paper which came into my hands without the knowledge of the writer. He is a poor working man of this village—a thoughtful, reading, feeling being, whose mind is too keen for his frame, and wears it out. I have not spoken to him above thrice in my life, for he is a Dissenter, and has rarely come in my way. The document is a sort of record of his feelings, after the perusal of ‘Jane Eyre;’ it is artless and earnest; genuine and generous. You must return it to me, for I value it more than testimonies from higher sources. He said, ‘Miss Brontë, if she knew he had written it, would scorn him;’ but, indeed, Miss Brontë does not scorn him; she only grieves that a mind of which this is the emanation, should be kept crushed by the leaden hand of poverty—by the trials of uncertain health, and the claims of a large family.

“As to the ‘Times,’ as you say, the acrimony of its critique has proved, in some measure, its own antidote; to have been more effective, it should have been juster. I think it has had little weight up here in the North; it may be, that annoying remarks, if made, are not suffered to reach my ear; but certainly, while I have heard little condemnatory of ‘Shirley,’ more than once have I been deeply moved by manifestations of even enthusiastic approbation. I deem it unwise to dwell much on these matters; but for once I must permit myself to remark, that the generous pride many of the Yorkshire people have taken in the matter, has been such as to awake and

claim my gratitude,—especially since it has afforded a source of reviving pleasure to my father in his old age. The very curates, poor fellows! show no resentment: each characteristically finds solace for his own wounds in crowing over his brethren. Mr. Donne was, at first, a little disturbed; for a week or two he was in disquietude, but he is now soothed down; only yesterday I had the pleasure of making him a comfortable cup of tea, and seeing him sip it with revived complacency. It is a curious fact that, since he read ‘Shirley,’ he has come to the house oftener than ever, and been remarkably meek and assiduous to please. Some people’s natures are veritable enigmas: I quite expected to have had one good scene at least with him; but as yet nothing of the sort has occurred.”

CHAPTER VI.

During the earlier months of this spring, Haworth was extremely unhealthy. The weather was damp, low fever was prevalent, and the household at the Parsonage suffered along with its neighbours. Charlotte says, “I have felt it (the fever) in frequent thirst and infrequent appetite; Papa too, and even Martha, have complained.” This depression of health produced depression of spirits, and she grew more and more to dread the proposed journey to London with Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth. “I know what the effect and what the pain will be, how wretched I shall often feel, and how thin and haggard I shall get; but he who shuns suffering will never win victory. If I mean to improve, I must strive and endure.... Sir James has been a physician, and looks at me with a physician’s eye: he saw at once that I could not stand much fatigue, nor bear the presence of many strangers. I believe he would partly understand how soon my stock of animal spirits was brought to a low ebb; but none—not the most skilful physician—can get at more than the outside of these things; the heart knows its own bitterness, and the frame its own poverty, and the mind its own struggles. Papa is eager and restless for me to go; the idea of a refusal quite hurts him.”

But the sensations of illness in the family increased; the symptoms were probably aggravated, if not caused, by the immediate vicinity of the church-yard, “paved with rain-blackened tombstones.” On April 29th she writes:—

“We have had but a poor week of it at Haworth. Papa continues far from well; he is often very sickly in the morning, a symptom which I have remarked before in his aggravated attacks of bronchitis; unless he should get much better, I shall never think of leaving him to go to London, Martha has suffered from tic-douloureux, with sickness and fever, just like you. I have a bad cold, and a stubborn sore throat; in short, everybody but old Tabby is out of sorts. When—was here, he complained of a sudden headache, and the night after he was gone I had something similar, very bad,—lasting about three hours.”

A fortnight later she writes:—

"I did not think Papa well enough to be left, and accordingly begged Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth to return to London without me. It was arranged that we were to stay at several of their friends' and relatives' houses on the way; a week or more would have been taken up on the journey. I cannot say that I regret having missed this ordeal; I would as lief have walked among red-hot plough-shares; but I do regret one great treat, which I shall now miss. Next Wednesday is the anniversary dinner of the Royal Literary Fund Society, held in Freemasons' Hall. Octavian Blewitt, the secretary, offered me a ticket for the ladies' gallery. I should have seen all the great literati and artists gathered in the hall below, and heard them speak; Thackeray and Dickens are always present among the rest. This cannot now be. I don't think all London can afford another sight to me so interesting."

It became requisite, however, before long, that she should go to London on business; and as Sir James Kay Shuttleworth was detained in the country by indisposition, she accepted Mrs. Smith's invitation to stay quietly at her house, while she transacted her affairs.

In the interval between the relinquishment of the first plan and the adoption of the second, she wrote the following letter to one who was much valued among her literary friends:—

"May 22nd.

"I had thought to bring the 'Leader'[1] and the' Athenæum' myself this time, and not to have to send them by post, but it turns out otherwise; my journey to London is again postponed, and this time indefinitely. Sir James Kay Shuttleworth's state of health is the cause—a cause, I fear, not likely to be soon removed..... Once more, then, I settle myself down in the quietude of Haworth Parsonage, with books for my household companions, and an occasional letter for a visitor; a mute society, but neither quarrelsome, nor vulgarizing, nor unimproving.

“One of the pleasures I had promised myself consisted in asking you several questions about the ‘Leader,’ which is really, in its way, an interesting paper. I wanted, amongst other things, to ask you the real names of some of the contributors, and also what Lewes writes besides his ‘Apprenticeship of Life.’ I always think the article headed ‘Literature’ is his. Some of the communications in the ‘Open Council’ department are odd productions; but it seems to me very fair and right to admit them. Is not the system of the paper altogether a novel one? I do not remember seeing anything precisely like it before.

“I have just received yours of this morning; thank you for the enclosed note. The longings for liberty and leisure which May sunshine wakens in you, stir my sympathy. I am afraid Cornhill is little better than a prison for its inmates on warm spring or summer days. It is a pity to think of you all toiling at your desks in such genial weather as this. For my part, I am free to walk on the moors; but when I go out there alone, everything reminds me of the times when others were with me, and then the moors seem a wilderness, featureless, solitary, saddening. My sister Emily had a particular love for them, and there is not a knoll of heather, not a branch of fern, not a young bilberry-leaf, not a fluttering lark or linnet, but reminds me of her. The distant prospects were Anne’s delight, and when I look round, she is in the blue tints, the pale mists, the waves and shadows of the horizon. In the hill-country silence, their poetry comes by lines and stanzas into my mind: once I loved it; now I dare not read it, and am driven often to wish I could taste one draught of oblivion, and forget much that, while mind remains, I never shall forget. Many people seem to recall their departed relatives with a sort of melancholy complacency, but I think these have not watched them through lingering sickness, nor witnessed their last moments: it is these reminiscences that stand by your bedside at night, and rise at your pillow in the morning. At the end of all, however, exists the Great Hope. Eternal Life is theirs now.”

She had to write many letters, about this time, to authors who sent her their books, and strangers who expressed their admiration of her own. The

following was in reply to one of the latter class, and was addressed to a young man at Cambridge:—

"May 23rd, 1850.

"Apologies are indeed unnecessary for a 'reality of feeling, for a genuine unaffected impulse of the spirit,' such as prompted you to write the letter which I now briefly acknowledge.

"Certainly it is 'something to me' that what I write should be acceptable to the feeling heart and refined intellect; undoubtedly it is much to me that my creations (such as they are) should find harbourage, appreciation, indulgence, at any friendly hand, or from any generous mind. You are very welcome to take Jane, Caroline, and Shirley for your sisters, and I trust they will often speak to their adopted brother when he is solitary, and soothe him when he is sad. If they cannot make themselves at home in a thoughtful, sympathetic mind, and diffuse through its twilight a cheering, domestic glow, it is their fault; they are not, in that case, so amiable, so benignant, not so real as they ought to be. If they can, and can find household altars in human hearts, they will fulfil the best design of their creation, in therein maintaining a genial flame, which shall warm but not scorch, light but not dazzle.

"What does it matter that part of your pleasure in such beings has its source in the poetry of your own youth rather than in any magic of theirs? What, that perhaps, ten years hence, you may smile to remember your present recollections, and view under another light both 'Currer Bell' and his writings? To me this consideration does not detract from the value of what you now feel. Youth has its romance, and maturity its wisdom, as morning and spring have their freshness, noon and summer their power, night and winter their repose. Each attribute is good in its own season. Your letter gave me pleasure, and I thank you for it.

"CURRER BELL."

Miss Brontë went up to town at the beginning of June, and much enjoyed her stay there; seeing very few persons, according to the agreement she

made before she went; and limiting her visit to a fortnight, dreading the feverishness and exhaustion which were the inevitable consequences of the slightest excitement upon her susceptible frame.

“June 12 th.

“Since I wrote to you last, I have not had many moments to myself, except such as it was absolutely necessary to give to rest. On the whole, however, I have thus far got on very well, suffering much less from exhaustion than I did last time.

“Of course I cannot give you in a letter a regular chronicle of how my time has been spent. I can only just notify what I deem three of its chief incidents:—a sight of the Duke of Wellington at the Chapel Royal (he is a real grand old man), a visit to the House of Commons (which I hope to describe to you some day when I see you), and last, not least, an interview with Mr. Thackeray. He made a morning call, and sat above two hours. Mr. Smith only was in the room the whole time. He described it afterwards as a ‘queer scene,’ and I suppose it was. The giant sate before me; I was moved to speak to him of some of his short-comings (literary of course); one by one the faults came into my head, and one by one I brought them out, and sought some explanation or defence. He did defend himself, like a great Turk and heathen; that is to say, the excuses were often worse than the crime itself. The matter ended in decent amity; if all be well, I am to dine at his house this evening.

“I have seen Lewes too..... I could not feel otherwise to him than half-sadly, half-tenderly,—a queer word that last, but I use it because the aspect of Lewes’s face almost moves me to tears; it is so wonderfully like Emily, —her eyes, her features, the very nose, the somewhat prominent mouth, the forehead,-even, at moments, the expression: whatever Lewes says, I believe I cannot hate him. Another likeness I have seen, too, that touched me sorrowfully. You remember my speaking of a Miss K.,[be] a young authoress, who supported her mother by writing? Hearing that she had a longing to see me, I called on her yesterday..... She met me half-frankly, half-tremblingly; we sate down together, and when I had talked with her five minutes, her face was no longer strange, but mournfully familiar;—it was Martha in every hneament. I shall try to find a moment to see her again..... I do not

intend to stay here, at the furthest, more than a week longer; but at the end of that time I cannot go home, for the house at Haworth is just now unroofed; repairs were become necessary.

She soon followed her letter to the friend to whom it was written; but her visit was a very short one, for, in accordance with a plan made before leaving London, she went on to Edinburgh to join the friends with whom she had been staying in town.[2] She remained only a few days in Scotland, and those were principally spent in Edinburgh, with which she was delighted, calling London a “dreary place” in comparison.

“My stay in Scotland” (she wrote some weeks later) “was short, and what I saw was chiefly comprised in Edinburgh and the neighbourhood, in Abbotsford and in Melrose, for I was obliged to relinquish my first intention of going from Glasgow to Oban, and thence through a portion of the Highlands; but though the time was brief, and the view of objects limited, I found such a charm of situation, association, and circumstance, that I think the enjoyment experienced in that little space equalled in degree, and excelled in kind, all which London yielded during a month’s sojourn. Edinburgh, compared to London, is like a vivid page of history compared to a large dull treatise on political economy; and as to Melrose and Abbotsford, the very names possess music and magic.”

And again, in a letter to a different correspondent, she says:—

“I would not write to you immediately on my arrival at home, because each return to this old house brings with it a phase of feeling which it is better to pass through quietly before beginning to indite letters. The six weeks of change and enjoyment are past, but they are not lost; memory took a sketch of each as it went by, and, especially, a distinct daguerreotype of the two days I spent in Scotland. Those were two very pleasant days. I always liked Scotland as an idea, but now, as a reality I like it far better; it furnished me with some hours as happy almost as any I ever spent. Do not fear, however, that I am going to bore you with description; you will, before

now, have received a pithy and pleasant report of all things, to which any addition of mine would be superfluous. My present endeavours are directed towards recalling my thoughts, cropping their wings, drilling them into correct discipline, and forcing them to settle to some useful work: they are idle and keep taking the train down to London, or making a foray over the Border—especially are they prone to perpetrate that last excursion; and who, indeed, that has once seen Edinburgh, with its couchant craglion, but must see it again in dreams, waking or sleeping? My dear sir, do not think I blaspheme, when I tell you that your great London, as compared to Dun-Edin, 'mine own romantic town,' is as prose compared to poetry, or as a great rumbling, rambling, heavy epic compared to a lyric, brief, bright, clear, and vital as a flash of lightning. You have nothing like Scott's monument, or, if you had that, and all the glories of architecture assembled together, you have nothing like Arthur's Seat, and above all, you have not the Scotch national character; and it is that grand character after all which gives the land its true charm, its true greatness."

On her return from Scotland, she again spent a few days with her friends,[bf] and then made her way to Haworth.

"July 15 th.

"I got home very well, and full glad was I that no insuperable obstacle had deferred my return one single day longer. Just at the foot of Bridgehouse hill, I met John—[bg] staff in hand; he fortunately saw me in the cab, stopped, and informed me he was setting off to B—, by Mr. Brontë's orders, to see how I was, for that he had been quite miserable ever since he got Miss—'s letter. I found on my arrival, that Papa had worked himself up to a sad pitch of nervous excitement and alarm, in which Martha and Tabby were but too obviously joining him.[3] .... The house looks very clean, and, I think, is not damp; there is, however, still a great deal to do in the way of settling and arranging,—enough to keep me disagreeably busy for some time to come. I was truly thankful to find Papa pretty well, but I fear he is just beginning to show symptoms of a cold: my cold continues better..... An

article in a newspaper I found awaiting me on my arrival, amused me; it was a paper published while I was in London. I enclose it to give you a laugh; it professes to be written by an Author jealous of Authoresses. I do not know who he is, but he must be one of those I met..... The ‘ugly men,’ giving themselves ‘Rochester airs,’ is no bad hit; some of those alluded to will not like it.”

While Miss Brontë was staying in London, she was induced to sit for her portrait to Richmond.‡ It is a crayon drawing; in my judgment an admirable likeness, though of course there is some difference of opinion on the subject; and, as usual, those best acquainted with the original were least satisfied with the resemblance. Mr. Brontë thought that it looked older than Charlotte did, and that her features had not been flattered; but he acknowledged that the expression was wonderfully good and life-like. She sent the following amusing account of the arrival of the portrait to the donor:—

“Aug. 1 st.

“The little box for me came at the same time as the large one for Papa. When you first told me that you had had the Duke’s picture framed, and had given it to me, I felt half provoked with you for performing such a work of supererogation, but now, when I see it again, I cannot but acknowledge that, in so doing, you were felicitously inspired. It is his very image, and, as Papa said when he saw it, scarcely in the least like the ordinary portraits; not only the expression, but even the form of the head is different, and of a far nobler character. I esteem it a treasure. The lady who left the parcel for me was, it seems, Mrs. Gore.bh The parcel contained one of her works, ‘The Hamiltons,’ and a very civil and friendly note, in which I find myself addressed as ‘Dear Jane.’ Papa seems much pleased with the portrait, as do the few other persons who have seen it, with one notable exception; viz., our old servant, who tenaciously maintains that it is not like—that it is too old-looking; but as she, with equal tenacity, asserts that the Duke of Wellington’s picture is a portrait of ‘the Master’ (meaning Papa), I am afraid not much weight is to be ascribed to her opinion; doubtless she confuses her recollections of me as I was in childhood with present

impressions. Requesting always to be very kindly remembered to your mother and sisters, I am, yours very thanklessly (according to desire),

“C. BRONTË.”

It may easily be conceived that two people living together as Mr. Brontë and his daughter did, almost entirely dependent on each other for society, and loving each other deeply (although not demonstratively)—that these two last members of a family would have their moments of keen anxiety respecting each other’s health. There is not one letter of hers which I have read, that does not contain some mention of her father’s state in this respect. Either she thanks God with simple earnestness that he is well, or some infirmities of age beset him, and she mentions the fact, and then winces away from it, as from a sore that will not bear to be touched. He, in his turn, noted every indisposition of his one remaining child’s, exaggerated its nature, and sometimes worked himself up into a miserable state of anxiety, as in the case she refers to, when her friend having named in a letter to him that his daughter was suffering from a bad cold, he could not rest till he despatched a messenger, to go, “staff in hand,” a distance of fourteen miles, and see with his own eyes what was her real state, and return and report.

She evidently felt that this natural anxiety on the part of her father and friend increased the nervous depression of her own spirits, whenever she was ill; and in the following letter she expresses her strong wish that the subject of her health should be as little alluded to as possible.

“Aug. 7th.

“I am truly sorry that I allowed the words to which you refer to escape my lips, since their effect on you has been unpleasant; but try to chase every shadow of anxiety from your mind, and, unless the restraint be very disagreeable to you, permit me to add an earnest request that you will broach the subject to me no more. It is the undisguised and most harassing anxiety of others that has fixed in my mind thoughts and expectations which must canker wherever they take root; against which every effort of religion or philosophy must at times totally fail; and subjugation to which is

a cruel terrible fate—the fate, indeed, of him whose life was passed under a sword suspended by a horse-hair. I have had to entreat Papa's consideration on this point. My nervous system is soon wrought on. I should wish to keep it in rational strength and coolness; but to do so I must determinedly resist the kindly-meant, but too irksome expression of an apprehension, for the realization or defeat of which I have no possible power to be responsible. At present, I am pretty well. Thank God! Papa, I trust, is no worse, but he complains of weakness."

CHAPTER VII.

Her father was always anxious to procure every change that was possible for her, seeing, as he did, the benefit which she derived from it, however reluctant she might have been to leave her home and him beforehand. This August she was invited to go for a week to the neighbourhood of Bowness, where Sir James Kay Shuttleworth had taken a house; but she says, "I consented to go, with reluctance, chiefly to please Papa, whom a refusal on my part would much have annoyed; but I dislike to leave him. I trust he is not worse, but his complaint is still weakness. It is not right to anticipate evil, and to be always looking forward with an apprehensive spirit; but I think grief is a two-edged sword, it cuts both ways; the memory of one loss is the anticipation of another."

It was during this visit at the Briery—Lady Kay Shuttleworth having kindly invited me to meet her there—that I first made acquaintance with Miss Brontë. If I copy out part of a letter, which I wrote soon after this to a friend, who was deeply interested in her writings, I shall probably convey my first impressions more truly and freshly than by amplifying what I then said into a longer description.[1]

"Dark when I got to Windermere station; a drive along the level road to Low-wood; then a stoppage at a pretty house, and then a pretty drawing-room, in which were Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth, and a little lady in a black silk gown, whom I could not see at first for the dazzle in the room; she came up and shook hands with me at once. I went up to unbonnet, &c., came down to tea; the little lady worked away and hardly spoke, but I had time for a good look at her. She is (as she calls herself) *undeveloped*, thin, and more than half a head shorter than I am; soft brown hair, not very dark; eyes (very good and expressive, looking straight and open at you) of the same colour as her hair; a large mouth; the forehead square, broad, and rather overhanging. She has a very sweet voice; rather hesitates in choosing her expressions, but when chosen they seem without an effort admirable, and just befitting the occasion; there is nothing

overstrained, but perfectly simple..... After breakfast, we four went out on the lake, and Miss Brontë agreed with me in liking Mr. Newman's 'Soul,' and in liking 'Modern Painters,' and the idea of the 'Seven Lamps;' and she told me about Father Newman's lectures [2] at the Oratory in a very quiet, concise, graphic way..... She is more like Miss—[bi] than any one in her ways —if you can fancy Miss—to have gone through suffering enough to have taken out every spark of merriment, and to be shy and silent from the habit of extreme, intense solitude. Such a life as Miss Brontë's I never heard of before.—described[bj] her home to me as in a village of grey stone houses, perched up on the north side of a bleak moor, looking over sweeps of bleak moors, &c. &c.

"We were only three days together; the greater part of which was spent in driving about, in order to show Miss Brontë the Westmoreland scenery, as she had never been there before. We were both included in an invitation to drink tea quietly at Fox How;[3] and I then saw how severely her nerves were taxed by the effort of going amongst strangers. We knew beforehand that the number of the party would not exceed twelve; but she suffered the whole day from an acute headache brought on by apprehension of the evening.

"Brierly Close was situated high above Low-wood, and of course commanded an extensive view and wide horizon. I was struck by Miss Brontë's careful examination of the shape of the clouds and the signs of the heavens, in which she read, as from a book, what the coming weather would be. I told her that I saw she must have a view equal in extent at her own home. She said that I was right, but that the character of the prospect from Haworth was very different; that I had no idea what a companion the sky became to any one living in solitude,—more than any inanimate object on earth—more than the moors themselves."

The following extracts convey some of her own impressions and feelings respecting this visit:—

"You said I should stay longer than a week in Westmoreland; you ought by this time to know me better. Is it my habit to keep dawdling at a place

long after the time I first fixed on for departing? I have got home, and I am thankful to say Papa seems,—to say the least,—no worse than when I left him, yet I wish he were stronger. My visit passed off very well; I am very glad I went. The scenery is, of course, grand; could I have wandered about amongst those hills alone, I could have drank in all their beauty; even in a carriage with company it was very well. Sir James was all the while as kind and friendly as he could be; he is in much better health..... Miss Martineau was from home; she always leaves her house at Ambleside during the Lake season, to avoid the influx of visitors to which she would otherwise be subject.

"If I could only have dropped unseen out of the carriage, and gone away by myself in amongst those grand hills and sweet dales, I should have drank in the full power of this glorious scenery. In company this can hardly be. Sometimes, while—[bk] was warning me against the faults of the artist-class, all the while vagrant artist instincts were busy in the mind of his listener.

"I forgot to tell you that, about a week before I went to Westmoreland, there came an invitation to Harden Grange; which, of course, I declined. Two or three days after, a large party made their appearance here, consisting of Mrs. F—, and sundry other ladies and two gentlemen; one tall and stately, black haired and whiskered, who turned out to be Lord John Manners, the other not so distinguished looking, shy, and a little queer, who was Mr. Smythe, the son of Lord Strangford.[bl] I found Mrs. F. a true lady in manners and appearance, very gentle and unassuming. Lord John Manners brought in his hand a brace of grouse for Papa, which was a well-timed present: a day or two before Papa had been wishing for some."

To these extracts I must add one other from a letter referring to this time. It is addressed to Miss Wooler, the kind friend of both her girlhood and womanhood, who had invited her to spend a fortnight with her at her cottage lodgings.

"Haworth, Sept. 27th, 1850.

“When I tell you that I have already been to the Lakes this season, and that it is scarcely more than a month since I returned, you will understand that it is no longer within my option to accept your kind invitation. I wish I could have gone to you. I have already had my excursion, and there is an end of it. Sir James Kay Shuttleworth is residing near Windermere, at a house called the ‘Briery,’ and it was there I was staying for a little time this August. He very kindly showed me the neighbourhood, as it can be seen from a carriage, and I discerned that the Lake country is a glorious region, of which I had only seen the similitude in dreams, waking or sleeping. Decidedly I find it does not agree with me to prosecute the search of the picturesque in a carriage. A waggon, a spring-cart, even a post-chaise might do; but the carriage upsets everything. I longed to slip out unseen, and to run away by myself in amongst the hills and dales. Erratic and vagrant instincts tormented me, and these I was obliged to control, or rather suppress, for fear of growing in any degree enthusiastic, and thus drawing attention to the ‘lioness’—the authoress.

“You say that you suspect I have formed a large circle of acquaintance by this time. No: I cannot say that I have. I doubt whether I possess either the wish or the power to do so. A few friends I should like to have, and these few I should like to know well; if such knowledge brought proportionate regard, I could not help concentrating my feelings; dissipation, I think, appears synonymous with dilution. However, I have, as yet, scarcely been tried. During the month I spent in London in the spring, I kept very quiet, having the fear of lionising before my eyes. I only went out once to dinner; and once was present at an evening party; and the only visits I have paid have been to Sir James Kay Shuttleworth’s and my publisher’s. From this system I should not like to depart; as far as I can see, indiscriminate visiting tends only to a waste of time and a vulgarising of character. Besides, it would be wrong to leave Papa often; he is now in his seventy-fifth year, the infirmities of age begin to creep upon him; during the summer he has been much harassed by chronic bronchitis, but I am thankful to say that he is now somewhat better. I think my own health has derived benefit from change and exercise.

“Somebody in D—professes to have authority for saying, that ‘when Miss Brontë was in London she neglected to attend Divine service on the

Sabbath, and in the week spent her time in going about to balls, theatres, and operas.' On the other hand, the London quidnuncs make my seclusion a matter of wonder, and devise twenty romantic fictions to account for it. Formerly I used to listen to report with interest, and a certain credulity; but I am now grown deaf and sceptical; experience has taught me how absolutely devoid of foundation her stories may be."

I must now quote from the first letter I had the privilege of receiving from Miss Brontë. It is dated August the 27th.

"Papa and I have just had tea; he is sitting quietly in his room, and I in mine; 'storms of rain' are sweeping over the garden and churchyard: as to the moors, they are hidden in thick fog. Though alone, I am not unhappy; I have a thousand things to be thankful for, and, amongst the rest, that this morning I received a letter from you, and that this evening I have the privilege of answering it.

"I do not know the 'Life of Sydney Taylor;' whenever I have the opportunity I will get it. The little French book you mentioned shall also take its place on the list of books to be procured as soon as possible. It treats a subject interesting to all women—perhaps, more especially to single women; though, indeed, mothers, like you, study it for the sake of their daughters. The 'Westminster Review'[4] is not a periodical I see regularly, but some time since I got hold of a number—for last January, I think—in which there was an article entitled 'Woman's Mission' (the phrase is hackneyed) , containing a great deal that seemed to me just and sensible. Men begin to regard the position of woman in another light than they used to do; and a few men, whose sympathies are fine and whose sense of justice is strong, think and speak of it with a candour that commands my admiration. They say, however—and, to an extent, truly—that the amelioration of our condition depends on ourselves. Certainly there are evils which our own efforts will best reach; but as certainly there are other evils—deep-rooted in the foundations of the social system—which no

efforts of ours can touch: of which we cannot complain; of which it is advisable not too often to think.

"I have read Tennyson's 'In Memoriam,'[5] or rather part of it; I closed the book when I had got about half way. It is beautiful; it is mournful; it is monotonous. Many of the feelings expressed bear, in their utterance, the stamp of truth; yet, if Arthur Hallam had been somewhat nearer Alfred Tennyson,—his brother instead of his friend,—I should have distrusted this rhymed, and measured, and printed monument of grief. What change the lapse of years may work I do not know; but it seems to me that bitter sorrow, while recent, does not flow out in verse.

"I promised to send you Wordsworth's 'Prelude,' and, accordingly, despatch it by this post; the other little volume shall follow in a day or two. I shall be glad to hear from you whenever you have time to write to me, *but you are never, on any account, to do this except when inclination prompts and leisure permits.* I should never thank you for a letter which you had felt it a task to write."

A short time after we had met at the Briery, she sent me the volume of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell's poems; and thus alludes to them in the note that accompanied the parcel:—

"The little book of rhymes was sent by way of fulfilling a rashly made promise; and the promise was made to prevent you from throwing away four shillings in an injudicious purchase. I do not like my own share of the work, nor care that it should be read: Ellis Bell's I think good and vigorous, and Acton's have the merit of truth and simplicity. Mine are chiefly juvenile productions; the restless effervescence of a mind that would not be still. In those days, the sea too often 'wrought and was tempestuous,' and weed, sand, shingle—all turned up in the tumult. This image is much too magniloquent for the subject, but you will pardon it."

Another letter of some interest was addressed, about this time, to a literary friend, on Sept. 5th:—

"The reappearance of the 'Athenaeum' is very acceptable, not merely for its own sake,—though I esteem the opportunity of its perusal a privilege,—but because, as a weekly token of the remembrance of friends, it cheers and gives pleasure. I only fear that its regular transmission may become a task to you; in this case, discontinue it at once.

"I did indeed enjoy my trip to Scotland, and yet I saw little of the face of the country; nothing of its grander or finer scenic features; but Edinburgh, Melrose, Abbotsford—these three in themselves sufficed to stir feelings of such deep interest and admiration, that neither at the time did I regret, nor have I since regretted, the want of wider space over which to diffuse the sense of enjoyment. There was room and variety enough to be very happy, and 'enough,' the proverb says, 'is as good as a feast.' The queen, indeed, was right to climb Arthur's Seat with her husband and children. I shall not soon forget how I felt when, having reached its summit, we all sat down and looked over the city—towards the sea and Leith, and the Pentland Hills. No doubt you are proud of being a native of Scotland,—proud of your country, her capital, her children, and her literature. You cannot be blamed.

"The article in the 'Palladium'[bm] is one of those notices over which an author rejoices trembling. He rejoices to find his work finely, fully, fervently appreciated, and trembles under the responsibility such appreciation seems to devolve upon him. I am counselled to wait and watch—D.V I will do so; yet it is harder to wait with the hands bound, and the observant and reflective faculties at their silent and unseen work, than to labour mechanically.

"I need not say how I felt the remarks on 'Wuthering Heights;' they woke the saddest yet most grateful feelings; they are true, they are discriminating, they are full of late justice, but it is very late—alas! in one sense, too late. Of this, however, and of the pang of regret for a light prematurely extinguished, it is not wise to speak much. Whoever the author of this article may be, I remain his debtor.

“Yet you see, even here, ‘Shirley’ is disparaged in comparison with ‘Jane Eyre;’ and yet I took great pains with ‘Shirley.’ I did not hurry; I tried to do my best, and my own impression was that it was not inferior to the former work; indeed, I had bestowed on it more time, thought, and anxiety: but great part of it was written under the shadow of impending calamity; and the last volume, I cannot deny, was composed in the eager, restless endeavour to combat mental sufferings that were scarcely tolerable.

“You sent the tragedy of ‘Galileo Galilei,’ by Samuel Brown, in one of the Cornhill parcels; it contained, I remember, passages of very great beauty. Whenever you send any more books (but that must not be till I return what I now have) I should be glad if you would include amongst them the ‘Life of Dr. Arnold.’[6] Do you know also the ‘Life of Sydney Taylor’? I am not familiar even with the name, but it has been recommended to me as a work meriting perusal. Of course, when I name any book, it is always understood that it should be quite convenient to send it.”

CHAPTER VIII.

It was thought desirable about this time, to republish “Wuthering Heights” and “Agnes Grey,” the works of the two sisters, and Charlotte undertook the task of editing them.[1]

She wrote to Mr. Williams, September 29th, 1850, “It is my intention to write a few lines of remark on ‘Wuthering Heights,’ which, however, I propose to place apart as a brief preface before the tale. I am likewise compelling myself to read it over, for the first time of opening the book since my sister’s death. Its power fills me with renewed admiration; but yet I am oppressed: the reader is scarcely ever permitted a taste of unalloyed pleasure; every beam of sunshine is poured down through black bars of threatening cloud; every page is surcharged with a sort of moral electricity; and the writer was unconscious of all this—nothing could make her conscious of it.

“And this makes me reflect,—perhaps I am too incapable of perceiving the faults and peculiarities of my own style.

“I should wish to revise the proofs, if it be not too great an inconvenience to send them. It seems to me advisable to modify the orthography of the old servant Joseph’s speeches; for though, as it stands, it exactly renders the Yorkshire dialect to a Yorkshire ear, yet, I am sure Southerns must find it unintelligible; and thus one of the most graphic characters in the book is lost on them.

“I grieve to say that I possess no portrait of either of my sisters.”

To her own dear friend, as to one who had known and loved her sisters, she writes still more fully respecting the painfulness of her task.

“There is nothing wrong, and I am writing you a line as you desire, merely to say that I am busy just now. Mr. Smith wishes to reprint some of Emily’s and Anne’s works, with a few little additions from the papers they

have left; and I have been closely engaged in revising, transcribing, preparing a preface, notice, &c. As the time for doing this is limited, I am obliged to be industrious. I found the task at first exquisitely painful and depressing; but regarding it in the light of a sacred duty, I went on, and now can bear it better. It is work, however, that I cannot do in the evening, for if I did, I should have no sleep at night. Papa, I am thankful to say, is in improved health, and so, I think, am I; I trust you are the same.

"I have just received a kind letter from Miss Martineau. She has got back to Ambleside, and had heard of my visit to the Lakes. She expressed her regret, &c., at not being at home.

"I am both angry and surprised at myself for not being in better spirits; for not growing accustomed, or at least resigned, to the solitude and isolation of my lot. But my late occupation left a result for some days, and indeed still, very painful. The reading over of papers, the renewal of remembrances brought back the pang of bereavement, and occasioned a depression of spirits well nigh intolerable. For one or two nights, I scarcely knew how to get on till morning; and when morning came, I was still haunted with a sense of sickening distress. I tell you these things, because it is absolutely necessary to me to have some relief. You will forgive me, and not trouble yourself, or imagine that I am one whit worse than I say. It is quite a mental ailment, and I believe and hope is better now. I think so, because I can speak about it, which I never can when grief is at its worst.

"I thought to find occupation and interest in writing, when alone at home, but hitherto my efforts have been vain; the deficiency of every stimulus is so complete. You will recommend me, I dare say, to go from home; but that does no good, even could I again leave Papa with an easy mind (thank God! he is better). I cannot describe what a time of it I had after my return from London, Scotland, &c. There was a reaction that sunk me to the earth; the deadly silence, solitude, desolation, were awful; the craving for companionship, the hopelessness of relief, were what I should dread to feel again.

"Dear—, when I think of you, it is with a compassion and tenderness that scarcely cheer me. Mentally, I fear, you also are too lonely and too little

occupied. It seems our doom, for the present at least. May God in His mercy help us to bear it!”

During her last visit to London as mentioned in one of her letters, she had made the acquaintance of her correspondent, Mr. Lewes. That gentleman says:—[2]

“Some months after” (the appearance of the review of “Shirley” in the “Edinburgh”), “Currer Bell came to London, and I was invited to meet her at your house. You may remember, she asked you not to point me out to her, but allow her to discover me if she could. She did recognise me almost as soon as I came into the room. You tried me in the same way; I was less sagacious. However, I sat by her side a great part of the evening, and was greatly interested by her conversation. On parting we shook hands, and she said, ‘We are friends now, are we not?’ ‘Were we not always, then?’ I asked. ‘No! not always,’ she said, significantly; and that was the only allusion she made to the offending article. I lent her some of Balzac’s and George Sand’s novels[3] to take with her into the country; and the following letter was written when they were returned:”—

“I am sure you will have thought me very dilatory in returning the books you so kindly lent me. The fact is, having some other books to send, I retained yours to enclose them in the same parcel.

“Accept my thanks for some hours of pleasant reading. Balzac was for me quite a new author; and in making his acquaintance, through the medium of ‘Modeste Mignon,’ and ‘Illusions perdues,’ you cannot doubt I have felt some interest. At first, I thought he was going to be painfully minute, and fearfully tedious; one grew impatient of his long parade of detail, his slow revelation of unimportant circumstances, as he assembled his personages on the stage; but by and bye I seemed to enter into the mystery of his craft, and to discover, with delight, where his force lay: is it not in the analysis of motive, and in a subtle perception of the most obscure and secret workings of the mind? Still, admire Balzac as we may, I think we do not like him; we rather feel towards him as towards an ungenial acquaintance who is forever

holding up in strong light our defects, and who rarely draws forth our better qualities.

“Truly, I like George Sand better. ”Fantastic, fanatical, unpractical enthusiast as she often is—far from truthful as are many of her views of life—misled, as she is apt to be, by her feelings—George Sand has a better nature than M. de Balzac; her brain is larger, her heart warmer than his. The ‘Lettres d’un Voyageur’ are full of the writer’s self; and I never felt so strongly, as in the perusal of this work, that most of her very faults spring from the excess of her good qualities: it is this excess which has often hurried her into difficulty, which has prepared for her enduring regret.

“But I believe her mind is of that order which disastrous experience teaches, without weakening or too much disheartening; and, in that case, the longer she lives the better she will grow. A hopeful point in all her writings is the scarcity of false French sentiment; I wish I could say its absence; but the weed flourishes here and there, even in the ‘Lettres.’ ”

I remember the good expression of disgust which Miss Brontë made use of in speaking to me of some of Balzac’s novels: “They leave such a bad taste in my mouth.”

The reader will notice that most of the letters from which I now quote are devoted to critical and literary subjects. These were, indeed, her principal interests at this time; the revision of her sister’s works, and writing a short memoir of them, was the painful employment of every day during the dreary autumn of 1850. Wearied out by the vividness of her sorrowful recollections, she sought relief in long walks on the moors. A friend of hers, who wrote to me on the appearance of the eloquent article in the “Daily News” upon the “Death of Currer Bell,” gives an anecdote which may well come in here.

“They are mistaken in saying she was too weak to roam the hills for the benefit of the air. I do not think any one, certainly not any woman, in this locality, went so much on the moors as she did, when the weather permitted Indeed, she was so much in the habit of doing so, that people, who live quite away on the edge of the common, knew her perfectly well. I remember on one occasion an old woman saw her at a little distance, and

she called out, ‘How! Miss Brontë! Hey yah (have you) seen ought o’ my cofe (calf)?’ Miss Brontë told her she could not say, for she did not know it. ‘Well!’ she said, ‘Yah know, it’s getting up like nah (now), between a cah (cow) and a cofe—what we call a stirk, yah know, Miss Brontë; will yah turn it this way if yah happen to see’t, as yah’re going back, Miss Brontë; nah do, Miss Brontë.’”

It must have been about this time that a visit was paid to her by some neighbours, who were introduced to her by a mutual friend. This visit has been described in a letter from which I am permitted to give extracts, which will show the impression made upon strangers by the character of the country round her home, and other circumstances. “Though the weather was drizzly, we resolved to make our long-planned excursion to Haworth; so we packed ourselves into the buffalo-skin, and that into the gig, and set off about eleven. The rain ceased, and the day was just suited to the scenery, —wild and chill,—with great masses of cloud glooming over the moors, and here and there a ray of sunshine covertly stealing through, and resting with a dim magical light upon some high bleak village; or darting down into some deep glen, lighting up the tall chimney or glistening on the windows and wet roof of the mill which lies couching in the bottom. The country got wilder and wilder as we approached Haworth; for the last four miles we were ascending a huge moor, at the very top of which lies the dreary black-looking village of Haworth. The village-street itself is one of the steepest hills I have ever seen, and the stones are so horribly jolting that I should have got out and walked with W—, if possible, but, having once begun the ascent, to stop was out of the question. At the top was the inn where we put up, close by the church; and the clergyman’s house, we were told, was at the top of the churchyard. So through that we went,—a dreary, dreary place, being literally paved with rain-blackened tombstones, and all on the slope, for at Haworth there is on the highest height a higher still, and Mr. Brontë’s house stands considerably above the church. There was the house before us, a small oblong stone house, with not a tree to screen it from the cutting wind; but how we were to get at it from the churchyard we could not see! There was an old man in the churchyard, brooding like a Ghoul over the graves, with a sort of grim hilarity on his face. I thought he looked hardly

human; however, he was human enough to tell us the way; and presently we found ourselves in the little bare parlour. Presently the door opened, and in came a superannuated mastiff, followed by an old gentleman very like Miss Brontë, who shook hands with us, and then went to call his daughter. A long interval, during which we coaxed the old dog, and looked at a picture of Miss Brontë, by Richmond, the solitary ornament of the room, looking strangely out of place on the bare walls, and at the books on the little shelves, most of them evidently the gift of the authors since Miss Brontë's celebrity. Presently she came in, and welcomed us very kindly, and took me upstairs to take off my bonnet, and herself brought me water and towels. The uncarpeted stone stairs and floors, the old drawers propped on wood, were all scrupulously clean and neat. When we went into the parlour again, we began talking very comfortably, when the door opened and Mr. Brontë looked in; seeing his daughter there, I suppose he thought it was all right, and he retreated to his study on the opposite side of the passage; presently emerging again to bring W—a country newspaper. This was his last appearance till we went. Miss Brontë spoke with the greatest warmth of Miss Martineau, and of the good she had gained from her. Well! we talked about various things; the character of the people,—about her solitude, &c., till she left the room to help about dinner, I suppose, for she did not return for an age. The old dog had vanished; a fat curly-haired dog honoured us with his company for some time, but finally manifested a wish to get out, so we were left alone. At last she returned, followed by the maid and dinner, which made us all more comfortable; and we had some very pleasant conversation, in the midst of which time passed quicker than we supposed, for at last W—found that it was half-past three, and we had fourteen or fifteen miles before us. So we hurried off, having obtained from her a promise to pay us a visit in the spring; and the old gentleman having issued once more from his study to say good-bye, we returned to the inn, and made the best of our way homewards.

"Miss Brontë put me in mind of her own 'Jane Eyre.' She looked smaller than ever, and moved about so quietly, and noiselessly, just like a little bird, as Rochester called her, barring that all birds are joyous, and that joy can never have entered that house since it was first built; and yet, perhaps, when that old man married, and took home his bride, and children's voices and

feet were heard about the house, even that desolate crowded grave-yard and biting blast could not quench cheerfulness and hope. Now there is something touching in the sight of that little creature entombed in such a place, and moving about herself like a spirit, especially when you think that the slight still frame encloses a force of strong fiery life, which nothing has been able to freeze or extinguish."

In one of the preceding letters, Miss Bronte referred to an article in the "Palladium," which had rendered what she considered the due meed of merit to "Wuthering Heights," her sister Emily's tale. Her own works were praised, and praised with discrimination, and she was grateful for this. But her warm heart was filled to the brim with kindly feelings towards him who had done justice to the dead. She anxiously sought out the name of the writer; and having discovered that it was Mr. Sydney Dobell, he immediately became one of her

"Peculiar people whom Death had made dear."

She looked with interest upon everything he wrote; and before long we shall find that they corresponded.

***To W. S. Williams,* Esq.**

"Oct. 25th.

"The box of books came last night, and, as usual, I have only gratefully to admire the selection made: 'Jeffrey's Essays,' 'Dr. Arnold's Life,' 'The Roman,[4] ''Alton Locke,' these were all wished for and welcome.

"You say I keep no books; pardon me—I am ashamed of my own rapaciousness: I have kept 'Macaulay's History,' and Wordsworth's

‘Prelude,’ and Taylor’s ‘Philip Van Artevelde.’ I soothe my conscience by saying that the two last,—being poetry—do not count. This is a convenient doctrine for me: I meditate acting upon it with reference to the ‘Roman,’ so I trust nobody in Cornhill will dispute its validity or affirm that ‘poetry’ has a value, except for trunk-makers.

“I have already had ‘Macaulay’s Essays,’ ‘Sidney Smith’s Lectures on Moral Philosophy,’ and ‘Knox on Race.’ Pickering’s work on the same subject I have not seen; nor all the volumes of Leigh Hunt’s Autobiography. However, I am now abundantly supplied for a long time to come. I liked Hazlitt’s Essays much.

“The autumn, as you say, has been very fine. I and solitude and memory have often profited by its sunshine on the moors.

“I had felt some disappointment at the non-arrival of the proof-sheets of ‘Wuthering Heights;’ a feverish impatience to complete the revision is apt to beset me. The work of looking over papers, &c., could not be gone through with impunity, and with unaltered spirits; associations too tender, regrets too bitter, sprang out of it. Meantime, the Cornhill books now, as heretofore, are my best medicine,—affording a solace which could not be yielded by the very same books procured from a common library.

“Already I have read the greatest part of the ‘Roman;’ passages in it possess a kindling virtue such as true poetry alone can boast; there are images of genuine grandeur; there are lines that at once stamp themselves on the memory. Can it be true that a new planet has risen on the heaven, whence all stars seemed fast fading? I believe it is; for this Sydney or Dobell speaks with a voice of his own, unborrowed, unmimicked. You hear Tennyson, indeed, sometimes, and Byron sometimes, in some passages of the ‘Roman;’ but then again you have a new note,—nowhere clearer than in a certain brief lyric, sang in a meeting of minstrels, a sort of dirge over a dead brother;—that not only charmed the ear and brain, it soothed the heart.”

The following extract will be read with interest as conveying her thoughts after the perusal of Dr. Arnold’s Life:—

“Nov. 6th.

“I have just finished reading the ‘Life of Dr. Arnold;’ but now when I wish, according to your request, to express what I think of it, I do not find the task very easy; proper terms seem wanting. This is not a character to be dismissed with a few laudatory words; it is not a one-sided character; pure panegyric would be inappropriate. Dr. Arnold (it seems to me) was not quite saintly; his greatness was cast in a mortal mould; he was a little severe, almost a little hard; he was vehement and somewhat oppugnant. Himself the most indefatigable of workers, I know not whether he could have understood, or made allowance for, a temperament that required more rest; yet not to one man in twenty thousand is given his giant faculty of labour; by virtue of it he seems to me the greatest of working men. Exacting he might have been, then, on this point; and granting that he were so, and a little hasty, stern, and positive, those were his sole faults (if, indeed, that can be called a fault which in no shape degrades the individual’s own character, but is only apt to oppress and overstrain the weaker nature of his neighbours). Afterwards come good qualities. About these there is nothing dubious. Where can we find justice, firmness, independence, earnestness, sincerity, fuller and purer than in him?

“But this is not all, and I am glad of it. Besides high intellect and stainless rectitude, his letters and his life attest his possession of the most true-hearted affection. Without this, however one might admire, we could not love him; but with it I think we love him much. A hundred such men—fifty—nay, ten or five such righteous men might save any country; might victoriously champion any cause.

“I was struck, too, by the almost unbroken happiness of his life; a happiness resulting chiefly, no doubt, from the right use to which he put that health and strength which God had given him, but also owing partly to a singular exemption from those deep and bitter griefs which most human beings are called on to endure. His wife was what he wished; his children were healthy and promising; his own health was excellent; his undertakings were crowned with success; even death was kind,—for, however sharp the pains of his last hour, they were but brief God’s blessing seems to have

accompanied him from the cradle to the grave. One feels thankful to know that it has been permitted to any man to live such a life.

“When I was in Westmoreland last August, I spent an evening at Fox How, where Mrs. Arnold and her daughters still reside. It was twilight as I drove to the place, and almost dark ere I reached it; still I could perceive that the situation was lovely. The house looked like a nest half buried in flowers and creepers; and, dusk as it was, I could feel that the valley and the hills round were beautiful as imagination could dream.”

If I say again what I have said already before, it is only to impress and re-impress upon my readers the dreary monotony of her life at this time. The dark, bleak season of the year brought back the long evenings, which tried her severely; all the more so, because her weak eyesight rendered her incapable of following any occupation but knitting by candlelight. For her father’s sake, as well as for her own, she found it necessary to make some exertion to ward off settled depression of spirits. She accordingly accepted an invitation to spend a week or ten days with Miss Martineau at Ambleside. She also proposed to come to Manchester and see me, on her way to Westmoreland. But, unfortunately, I was from home, and unable to receive her. The friends with whom I was staying in the South of England (hearing me express my regret that I could not accept her friendly proposal, and aware of the sad state of health and spirits which made some change necessary for her) wrote to desire that she would come and spend a week or two at their house. She acknowledged this invitation in a letter to me, dated

“Dec. 13th 1850.

“My dear Mrs. Gaskell,—Miss—’s kindness and yours is such that I am placed in the dilemma of not knowing how adequately to express my sense of it. This I know, however, very well—that if I could go and be with you for a week or two in a quiet south-country house, and with such kind people as you describe, I should like it much. I find the proposal marvellously to my taste; it is the pleasantest, gentlest, sweetest, temptation possible; but,

delectable as it is, its solicitations are by no means to be yielded to without the sanction of reason, and therefore I desire for the present to be silent, and to stand back till I have been to Miss Martineau’s, and returned home, and considered well whether it is a scheme as right as agreeable.

“Meantime, the mere thought does me good.”

On the 10th of December, the second edition of “Wuthering Heights” was published. She sent a copy of it to Mr. Dobell, with the following letter:—

To Mr. Dobell.

“Haworth, near Keighley, Yorkshire.

“Dec. 8th, 1850.

“I offer this little book to my critic in the ‘Palladium,’ and he must believe it accompanied by a tribute of the sincerest gratitude; not so much for anything he has said of myself, as for the noble justice he has rendered to one dear to me as myself—perhaps dearer; and perhaps one kind word spoken for her awakens a deeper, tenderer, sentiment of thankfulness than eulogies heaped on my own head. As you will see when you have read the biographical notice, my sister cannot thank you herself; she is gone out of your sphere and mine, and human blame and praise are nothing to her now. But to me, for her sake, they are something still; it revived me for many a day to find that, dead as she was, the work of her genius had at last met with worthy appreciation.

“Tell me, when you have read the introduction, whether any doubts still linger in your mind respecting the authorship of ‘Wuthering Heights,’ ‘Wildfell Hall,’ &c. Your mistrust did me some injustice; it proved a general conception of character such as I should be sorry to call mine; but

these false ideas will naturally arise when we only judge an author from his works. In fairness, I must also disclaim the flattering side of the portrait. I am no ‘young Penthesilea[bn] mediis in millibus,” but a plain country parson’s daughter.

“Once more I thank you, and that with a full heart.

“C. BRONTË.”

CHAPTER IX.

Immediately after the republication of her sister's book she went to Miss Martineau's. "I can write to you now, dear E—, for I am away from home, and relieved, temporarily, at least, by change of air and scene, from the heavy burden of depression which, I confess, has for nearly three months been sinking me to the earth. I never shall forget last autumn! Some days and nights have been cruel; but now, having once told you this, I need say no more on the subject. My loathing of solitude grew extreme; my recollection of my sisters intolerably poignant. I am better now. I am at Miss Martineau's for a week. Her house is very pleasant, both within and without; arranged at all points with admirable neatness and comfort. Her visitors enjoy the most perfect liberty; what she claims for herself she allows them. I rise at my own hour, breakfast alone (she is up at five, takes a cold bath, and a walk by starlight, and has finished breakfast and got to her work by seven o'clock). I pass the morning in the drawing-room—she, in her study. At two o'clock we meet—work, talk, and walk together till five, her dinner hour, spend the evening together, when she converses fluently and abundantly, and with the most complete frankness. I go to my own room soon after ten,—she sits up writing letters till twelve. She appears exhaustless in strength and spirits, and indefatigable in the faculty of labour. She is a great and a good woman; of course not without peculiarities, but I have seen none as yet that annoy me. She is both hard and warm-hearted, abrupt and affectionate, liberal and despotic. I believe she is not at all conscious of her own absolutism. When I tell her of it, she denies the charge warmly; then I laugh at her. I believe she almost rules Ambleside. Some of the gentry dislike her, but the lower orders have a great regard for her..... I thought I should like to spend two or three days with you before going home; so, if it is not inconvenient to you, I will (D.V) come on Monday and stay tillThursday..... I have truly enjoyed my visit here. I have seen a good many people, and all have been so marvellously kind; not the least so, the family of Dr. Arnold. Miss Martineau I relish inexpressibly."

Miss Brontë paid the visit she here proposes to her friend, but only remained two or three days. She then returned home, and immediately began to suffer from her old enemy, sickly and depressing headache. This was all the more trying to bear, as she was obliged to take an active share in the household work,—one servant being ill in bed, and the other, Tabby, aged upwards of eighty.

This visit to Ambleside did Miss Brontë much good, and gave her a stock of pleasant recollections, and fresh interests, to dwell upon in her solitary life. There are many references in her letters to Miss Martineau's character and kindness.

"She is certainly a woman of wonderful endowments, both intellectual and physical; and though I share few of her opinions, and regard her as fallible on certain points of judgment, I must still award her my sincerest esteem. The manner in which she combines the highest mental culture with the nicest discharge of feminine duties filled me with admiration; while her affectionate kindness earned my gratitude." "I think her good and noble qualities far outweigh her defects. It is my habit to consider the individual apart from his (or her) reputation, practice independent of theory, natural disposition isolated from acquired opinions. Harriet Martineau's person, practice, and character, inspire me with the truest affection and respect." "You ask me whether Miss Martineau made me a convert to mesmerism?[1] Scarcely; yet I heard miracles of its efficacy, and could hardly discredit the whole of what was told me. I even underwent a personal experiment; and though the result was not absolutely clear, it was inferred that in time I should prove an excellent subject. The question of mesmerism will be discussed with little reserve, I believe, in a forthcoming work of Miss Martineau's; and I have some painful anticipations of the manner in which other subjects, offering less legitimate ground for speculation, will be handled."

"Your last letter evinced such a sincere and discriminating admiration for Dr. Arnold, that perhaps you will not be wholly uninterested in hearing that,

during my last visit to Miss Martineau, I saw much more of Fox How and its inmates, and daily admired, in the widow and children of one of the greatest and best men of his time, the possession of qualities the most estimable and endearing. Of my kind hostess herself, I cannot speak in terms too high. Without being able to share all her opinions, philosophical, political, or religious,—without adopting her theories,—I yet find a worth and greatness in herself, and a consistency, benevolence, perseverance in her practice, such as wins the sincerest esteem and affection. She is not a person to be judged by her writings alone, but rather by her own deeds and life, than which nothing can be more exemplary or nobler. She seems to me the benefactress of Ambleside, yet takes no sort of credit to herself for her active and indefatigable philanthropy. The government of her household is admirably administered; all she does is well done, from the writing of a history down to the quietest female occupation. No sort of carelessness or neglect is allowed under her rule, and yet she is not over-strict, nor too rigidly exacting: her servants and her poor neighbours love as well as respect her.

"I must not, however, fall into the error of talking too much about her merely because my own mind is just now deeply impressed with what I have seen of her intellectual power and moral worth. Faults she has; but to me they appear very trivial weighed in the balance against her excellences."

"Your account of Mr. A—[2] tallies exactly with Miss M—'s. She, too, said that placidity and mildness (rather than originality and power) were his external characteristics. She described him as a combination of the antique Greek sage with the European modern man of science. Perhaps it was mere perversity in me to get the notion that torpid veins, and a cold, slow-beating heart, lay under his marble outside. But he is a materialist: he serenely denies us our hope of immortality, and quietly blots from man's future Heaven and the Life to come. That is why a savour of bitterness seasoned my feeling towards him.

"All you say of Mr. Thackeray is most graphic and characteristic. He stirs in me both sorrow and anger. Why should he lead so harassing a life? Why

should his mocking tongue so perversely deny the better feelings of his better moods?”

For some time, whenever she was well enough in health and spirits, she had been employing herself upon “Villette;” but she was frequently unable to write, and was both grieved and angry with herself for her inability. In February, she writes as follows to Mr. Smith:—

“Something you say about going to London; but the words are dreamy, and fortunately I am not obliged to hear or answer them. London and summer are many months away: our moors are all white with snow just now, and little redbreasts come every morning to the window for crumbs. One can lay no plans three or four months beforehand. Besides, I don’t deserve to go to London; nobody merits a change or a treat less. I secretly think, on the contrary, I ought to be put in prison, and kept on bread and water in solitary confinement—without even a letter from Cornhill—till I had written a book. One of two things would certainly result from such a mode of treatment pursued for twelve months; either I should come out at the end of that time with a three-volume MS. in my hand, or else with a condition of intellect that would exempt me ever after from literary efforts and expectations.”

Meanwhile, she was disturbed and distressed by the publication of Miss Martineau’s “Letters,” &c.; they came down with a peculiar force and heaviness upon a heart that looked, with fond and earnest faith, to a future life as to the meeting-place with those who were “loved and lost awhile.”

“Feb. 1 1, 1851.

“My dear Sir,—Have you yet read Miss Martineau’s and Mr. Atkinson’s new work, ‘Letters on the Nature and Development of Man’ ? If you have not, it would be worth your while to do so.

“Of the impression this book has made on me, I will not now say much. It is the first exposition of avowed atheism and materialism I have ever read; the first unequivocal declaration of disbelief in the existence of a God or a future life I have ever seen. In judging of such exposition and declaration, one would wish entirely to put aside the sort of instinctive horror they awaken, and to consider them in an impartial spirit and collected mood. This I find it difficult to do. The strangest thing is, that we are called on to rejoice over this hopeless blank—to receive this bitter bereavement as great gain—to welcome this unutterable desolation as a state of pleasant freedom. Who could do this if he would? Who would do it if he could?

“Sincerely, for my own part, do I wish to find and know the Truth; but if this be Truth, well may she guard herself with mysteries, and cover herself with a veil. If this be Truth, man or woman who beholds her can but curse the day he or she was born. I said, however, I would not dwell on what I thought; I wish to hear, rather, what some other person thinks,—some one whose feelings are unapt to bias his judgment. Read the book, then, in an unprejudiced spirit, and candidly say what you think of it. I mean, of course, if you have time—not otherwise.”

And yet she could not bear the contemptuous tone in which this work was spoken of by many critics; it made her more indignant than almost any other circumstance during my acquaintance with her. Much as she regretted the publication of the book, she could not see that it had given any one a right to sneer at an action, certainly prompted by no worldly motive, and which was but one error—the gravity of which she admitted—in the conduct of a person who had, all her life long, been striving, by deep thought and noble words, to serve her kind.

“Your remarks on Miss Martineau and her book pleased me greatly, from their tone and spirit. I have even taken the liberty of transcribing for her

benefit one or two phrases because I know they will cheer her; she likes sympathy and appreciation (as all people do who deserve them); and most fully do I agree with you in the dislike you express of that hard, contemptuous tone in which her work is spoken of by many critics."

Before I return from the literary opinions of the author to the domestic interests of the woman, I must copy out what she felt and thought about "The Stones of Venice."

"'The Stones of Venice'[bo] seem nobly laid and chiselled. How grandly the quarry of vast marbles is disclosed! Mr. Ruskin seems to me one of the few genuine writers, as distinguished from book-makers, of this age. His earnestness even amuses me in certain passages ; for I cannot help laughing to think how utilitarians will fume and fret over his deep, serious (and as they will think), fanatical reverence for Art. That pure and severe mind you ascribed to him speaks in every line. He writes like a consecrated priest of the Abstract and Ideal.

"I shall bring with me 'The Stone of Venice;' all the foundations of marble and of granite, together with the mighty quarry out of which they were hewn; and, into the bargain, a small assortment of crotchets and dicta —the private property of one John Ruskin, Esq."

As spring drew on, the depression of spirits to which she was subject began to grasp her again, and "to crush her with a day- and night-mare." She became afraid of sinking as low as she had done in the autumn; and to avoid this, she prevailed on her old friend and schoolfellow to come and stay with her for a few weeks in March. She found great benefit from this companionship,—both from the congenial society in itself, and from the self-restraint of thought imposed by the necessity of entertaining her and looking after her comfort. On this occasion, Miss Brontë said, "It will not do to get into the habit of running away from home, and thus temporarily

evading an oppression instead of facing, wrestling with and conquering it, or being conquered by it.”

I shall now make an extract from one of her letters, which is purposely displaced as to time. I quote it because it relates to a third offer of marriage[bp] which she had, and because I find that some are apt to imagine, from the extraordinary power with which she represented the passion of love in her novels, that she herself was easily susceptible of it.

“Could I ever feel enough for—, to accept of him as a husband? Friendship—gratitude—esteem—I have; but each moment he came near me, and that I could see his eyes fastened on me, my veins ran ice. Now that he is away, I feel far more gently towards him; it is only close by that I grow rigid, stiffening with a strange mixture of apprehension and anger, which nothing softens but his retreat, and a perfect subduing of his manner. I did not want to be proud, nor intend to be proud, but I was forced to be so. Most true it is, that we are over-ruled by One above us; that in His hands our very will is as clay in the hands of the potter.”

I have now named all the offers of marriage she ever received, until that was made which she finally accepted. The gentleman referred to in this letter, retained so much regard for her as to be her friend to the end of her life; a circumstance to his credit and to hers.

Before her friend E—took her departure, Mr. Brontë caught cold, and continued for some weeks much out of health, with an attack of bronchitis. His spirits too, became much depressed; and all his daughter’s efforts were directed towards cheering him.

When he grew better, and had regained his previous strength, she resolved to avail herself of an invitation which she had received some time before, to pay a visit in London. This year, 1851, was, as every one remembers, the time of the great Exhibition;[3] but even with that attraction in prospect, she did not intend to stay there long; and as usual, she made an agreement with

her friends, before finally accepting their offered hospitality, that her sojourn at their house was to be as quiet as ever, since any other way of proceeding disagreed with her both mentally and physically. She never looked excited except for a moment, when something in conversation called her out; but she often felt so, even about comparative trifles, and the exhaustion of reaction was sure to follow. Under such circumstances, she always became extremely thin and haggard; yet she averred that the change invariably did her good afterwards.

Her preparations in the way of dress for this visit, in the gay time of that gay season, were singularly in accordance with her feminine taste; quietly anxious to satisfy her love for modest, dainty, neat attire, and not regardless of the becoming, yet remembering consistency, both with her general appearance and with her means, in every selection she made.

“By the bye, I meant to ask you when you went to Leeds, to do a small errand for me, but fear your hands will be too full of business. It was merely this: in case you chanced to be in any shop where the lace cloaks, both black and white, of which I spoke, were sold, to ask their price. I suppose they would hardly like to send a few to Haworth to be looked at; indeed, if they cost very much, it would be useless, but if they are reasonable and they would send them, I should like to see them; and also some chemisettes of small size, (the full woman’s size don’t fit me) both of simple style for every day and good quality for best.” .... “It appears I could not rest satisfied when I was well off I told you I had taken one of the black lace mantles, but when I came to try it with the black satin dress, with which I should chiefly want to wear it, I found the effect was far from good; the beauty of the lace was lost, and it looked somewhat brown and rusty; I wrote to Mr.—, requesting him to change it for a white mantle of the same price; he was extremely courteous, and sent to London for one, which I have got this morning. The price is less, being but 11. 14s. 0d.; it is pretty, neat and light, looks well on black; and upon reasoning the matter over, I came to the philosophic conclusion, that it would be no shame for a person of my means to wear a cheaper thing; so I think I shall take it, and if you ever see it and call it ‘trumpery’ so much the worse.”

“Do you know that I was in Leeds on the very same day with you—last Wednesday? I had thought of telling you where I was going, and having

your help and company in buying a bonnet, &c., but then I reflected this would merely be making a selfish use of you, so I determined to manage or mismanage the matter alone. I went to Hurst and Hall's for the bonnet, and got one which seemed grave and quiet there amongst all the splendours; but now it looks infinitely too gay with its pink lining. I saw some beautiful silks of pale sweet colours, but had not the spirit nor the means to launch out at the rate of five shillings per yard, and went and bought a black silk at three shillings after all. I rather regret this, because papa says he would have lent me a sovereign if he had known. I believe, if you had been there, you would have forced me to get into debt.... I really can no more come to B— before I go to London than I can fly. I have quantities of sewing to do, as well as household matters to arrange, before I leave, as they will clean, &c. in my absence. Besides, I am grievously afflicted with headache, which I trust to change of air for relieving; but meantime, as it proceeds from the stomach, it makes me very thin and grey; neither you nor anybody else would fatten me up or put me in good condition for the visit; it is fated otherwise. No matter. Calm, your passion; yet I am glad to see it. Such spirit seems to prove health. Good bye, in haste.

"Your poor mother is like Tabby, Martha, and Papa; all these fancy I am somehow, by some mysterious process, to be married in London, or to engage myself to matrimony. How I smile internally! How groundless and improbable is the idea! Papa seriously told me yesterday, that if I married and left him he should give up housekeeping and go into lodgings!"

I copy the following, for the sake of the few words describing the appearance of the heathery moors in late summer.

To Sydney Dobell, Esq.

"May 24th, 1851.

"My dear Sir,—I hasten to send Mrs. Dobell the autograph. It was the word 'Album' that frightened me: I thought she wished me to write a sonnet

on purpose for it, which I could not do.

“Your proposal respecting a journey to Switzerland is deeply kind; it draws me with the force of a mighty Temptation, but the stern Impossible holds me back. No! I cannot go to Switzerland this summer.

“Why did the editor of the ‘Eclectic’ erase that most powerful and pictorial passage? He could not be insensible to its beauty; perhaps he thought it profane. Poor man!

“I know nothing of such an orchard-country as you describe. I have never seen such a region. Our hills only confess the coming of summer by growing green with young fern and moss, in secret little hollows. Their bloom is reserved for autumn; then they burn with a kind of dark glow, different, doubtless, from the blush of garden blossoms. About the close of next month, I expect to go to London, to pay a brief and quiet visit. I fear chance will not be so propitious as to bring you to town while I am there; otherwise, how glad I should be if you would call. With kind regards to Mrs. Dobell,—Believe me, sincerely yours,

“C. BRONTË.”

Her next letter is dated from London.

“June 2nd.

“I came here on Wednesday, being summoned a day sooner than I expected, in order to be in time for Thackeray’s second lecture, [bq] which was delivered on Thursday afternoon. This, as you may suppose, was a genuine treat to me, and I was glad not to miss it. It was given in Willis’ Rooms, where the Almacks balls are held—a great painted and gilded saloon with long sofas for benches. The audience was said to be the cream of London society, and it looked so. I did not at all expect the great lecturer would know me or notice me under these circumstances, with admiring duchesses and countesses seated in rows before him; but he met me as I entered—shook hands—took me to his mother, whom I had not before

seen, and introduced me. She is a fine, handsome, young-looking old lady; was very gracious, and called with one of her grand-daughters next day.

“Thackeray called too, separately. I had a long talk with him, and I think he knows me now a little better than he did; but of this I cannot yet be sure; he is a great and strange man. There is quite a furor for his lectures. They are a sort of essays, characterised by his own peculiar originality and power, and delivered with a finished taste and ease, which is felt, but cannot be described. Just before the lecture began, somebody came behind me, leaned over and said, ‘Permit me, as a Yorkshireman, to introduce myself.’ I turned round—saw a strange, not handsome, face, which puzzled me for half a minute, and then I said, ‘You are Lord Carlisle.’ He nodded and smiled; he talked a few minutes very pleasantly and courteously.

“Afterwards came another man with the same plea, that he was a Yorkshireman, and this turned out to be Mr. Monckton Milnes.[br] Then came Dr. Forbes, whom I was sincerely glad to see. On Friday, I went to the Crystal Palace; it is a marvellous, stirring, bewildering sight—a mixture of a genii palace, and a mighty bazaar, but it is not much in my way; I like the lecture better. On Saturday I saw the Exhibition at Somerset House; about half a dozen of the pictures are good and interesting, the rest of little worth. Sunday—yesterday—was a day to be marked with a white stone; through most of the day I was very happy, without being tired or over-excited. In the afternoon, I went to hear D’ Aubigné, the great Protestant French preacher; it was pleasant—half sweet, half sad—and strangely suggestive to hear the French language once more. For health, I have so far got on very fairly, considering that I came here far from well.”

The lady, who accompanied Miss Brontë[bs] to the lecture at Thackeray’s alluded to, says that, soon after they had taken their places, she was aware that he was pointing out her companion to several of his friends, but she hoped that Miss Brontë herself would not perceive it. After some time, however, during which many heads had been turned round, and many glasses put up, in order to look at the author of “Jane Eyre,” Miss Brontë said, “I am afraid Mr. Thackeray has been playing me a trick;” but she soon became too much absorbed in the lecture to notice the attention which was

being paid to her, except when it was directly offered, as in the case of Lord Carlisle and Mr. Monckton Milnes. When the lecture was ended, Mr. Thackeray came down from the platform, and making his way towards her, asked her for her opinion. This she mentioned to me not many days afterwards, adding remarks almost identical with those which I subsequently read in “Villette,” where a similar action on the part of M. Paul Emanuel is related.

“As our party left the Hall, he stood at the entrance; he saw and knew me, and lifted his hat; he offered his hand in passing, and uttered the words ‘Qu’en ditesvous?’—question eminently characteristic, and reminding me, even in this his moment of triumph, of that inquisitive restlessness, that absence of what I considered desirable self-control, which were amongst his faults. He should not have cared just then to ask what I thought, or what anybody thought; but he did care, and he was too natural to conceal, too impulsive to repress his wish. Well! if I blamed his over-eagerness, I liked his naïveté. I would have praised him; I had plenty of praise in my heart; but alas! no words on my lips. Who *has* words at the right moment? I stammered some lame expressions; but was truly glad when other people, coming up with profuse congratulations, covered my deficiency by their redundancy.”

As they were preparing to leave the room, her companion saw with dismay that many of the audience were forming themselves into two lines, on each side of the aisle down which they had to pass before reaching the door. Aware that any delay would only make the ordeal more trying, her friend took Miss Brontë’s arm in hers, and they went along the avenue of eager and admiring faces. During this passage through the “cream of society,” Miss Brontë’s hand trembled to such a degree, that her companion feared lest she should turn faint and be unable to proceed; and she dared not express her sympathy or try to give her strength by any touch or word, lest it might bring on the crisis she dreaded.

Surely, such thoughtless manifestation of curiosity is a blot on the scutcheon of true politeness! The rest of the account of this, her longest visit to London, shall be told in her own words.

“I sit down to write to you this morning in an inexpressibly flat state; having spent the whole of yesterday and the day before in a gradually increasing headache, which grew at last rampant and violent, ended with excessive sickness, and this morning I am quite weak and washy. I hoped to leave my headaches behind me at Haworth; but it seems I brought them carefully packed in my trunk, and very much have they been in my way since I came..... Since I wrote last, I have seen various things worth describing; Rachel, the great French actress,[bt] amongst the number. But to-day I really have no pith for the task. I can only wish you good bye with all my heart.”

“I cannot boast that London has agreed with me well this time; the oppression of frequent headache, sickness, and a low tone of spirits, has poisoned many moments which might otherwise have been pleasant. Sometimes I have felt this hard, and been tempted to murmur at Fate, which compels me to comparative silence and solitude for eleven months in the year, and in the twelfth, while offering social enjoyment, takes away the vigour and cheerfulness which should turn it to account. But circumstances are ordered for us, and we must submit.”

“Your letter would have been answered yesterday, but I was already gone out before post time, and was out all day. People are very kind, and perhaps I shall be glad of what I have seen afterwards, but it is often a little trying at the time. On Thursday, the Marquis of Westminster asked me to a great party, to which I was to go with Mrs. D—, a beautiful, and, I think, a kind woman too; but this I resolutely declined. On Friday I dined at the—‘s, and met Mrs. D—and Mr. Monckton Milnes. On Saturday I went to hear and see Rachel; a wonderful sight—terrible as if the earth had cracked deep at your feet, and revealed a glimpse of hell. I shall never forget it. She made me shudder to the marrow of my bones; in her some fiend has certainly taken up an incarnate home. She is not a woman; she is a snake; she is the —. On Sunday I went to the Spanish Ambassador’s Chapel, where Cardinal Wiseman, in his archiepiscopal robes and mitre, held a confirmation. The whole scene was impiously theatrical. Yesterday (Monday) I was sent for at ten to breakfast with Mr. Rogers, the patriarch-poet.[bu] Mrs. D—and Lord

Glenelg were there; no one else: this certainly proved a most calm, refined, and intellectual treat. After breakfast, Sir David Brewster† came to take us to the Crystal Palace. I had rather dreaded this, for Sir David is a man of profoundest science, and I feared it would be impossible to understand his explanations of the mechanism, &c.; indeed, I hardly knew how to ask him questions. I was spared all trouble: without being †David Brewster (1781-1868) was a Fellow of the Royal Society. questioned, he gave information in the kindest and simplest manner. After two hours spent at the Exhibition, and where, as you may suppose, I was very tired, we had to go to Lord Westminster's and spend two hours more in looking at the collection of pictures in his splendid gallery."

To another friend she writes:—

"—may have told you that I have spent a month in London this summer. When you come, you shall ask what questions you like on that point, and I will answer to the best of my stammering ability. Do not press me much on the subject of the 'Crystal Palace.' I went there five times, and certainly saw some interesting things, and the 'coup d'oeil' is striking and bewildering enough; but I never was able to get up any raptures on the subject, and each renewed visit was made under coercion rather than my own free will. It is an excessively bustling place; and, after all, its wonders appeal too exclusively to the eye, and rarely touch the heart or head. I make an exception to the last assertion, in favour of those who possess a large range of scientific knowledge. Once I went with Sir David Brewster, and perceived that he looked on objects with other eyes than mine."

Miss Brontë returned from London by Manchester, and paid us a visit of a couple of days at the end of June. The weather was so intensely hot, and she herself so much fatigued with her London sight-seeing, that we did little but sit indoors, with open windows and talk. The only thing she made a point of exerting herself to procure was a present for Tabby. It was to be a shawl, or rather a large handkerchief, such as she could pin across her neck and

shoulders, in the old-fashioned country manner. Miss Brontë took great pains in seeking out one which she thought would please the old woman.

On her arrival at home, she addressed the following letter to the friend with whom she had been staying in London:—

"Haworth, July 1 st, 1851.

"My dear Mrs. Smith,—Once more I am at home, where, I am thankful to say, I found my father very well. The journey to Manchester was a little hot and dusty, but otherwise pleasant enough. The two stout gentlemen, who filled a portion of the carriage when I got in, quitted it at Rugby, and two other ladies and myself had it to ourselves the rest of the way. The visit to Mrs. Gaskell formed a cheering break in the journey. Haworth Parsonage is rather a contrast, yet even Haworth Parsonage does not look gloomy in this bright summer weather; it is somewhat still, but with the windows open I can hear a bird or two singing on certain thorn-trees in the garden. My father and the servants think me looking better than when I left home, and I certainly feel better myself for the change. You are too much like your son to render it advisable I should say much about your kindness during my visit. However, one cannot help (like Captain Cuttle) making a note of these matters.[bv] Papa says I am to thank you in his name, and offer you his respects, which I do accordingly.—With truest regard to all your circle, believe me very sincerely yours,

"C. BRONTË."

"July 8th, 1851.

"My dear Sir,—Thackeray's last lecture must, I think, have been his best. What he says about Sterne[bw] is true. His observations on literary men, and their social obligations and individual duties, seem to me also true and full of mental and moral vigour..... The International Copyright Meeting seems to have had but a barren result, judging from the report in the Literary Gazette. I cannot see that Sir E. Bulwer and the rest did anything; nor can I well see what it is in their power to do. The argument brought forward

about the damage accruing to American national literature from the present piratical system, is a good and sound argument, but I am afraid the publishers—honest men—are not yet mentally prepared to give such reasoning due weight. I should think, that which refers to the injury inflicted upon themselves, by an oppressive competition in piracy, would influence them more; but, I suppose, all established matters, be they good or evil, are difficult to change. About the ‘Phrenological Character’ [4] I must not say a word. Of your own accord, you have found the safest point from which to view it: I will not say ‘look higher!’ I think you see the matter as it is desirable we should all see what relates to ourselves. If I had a right to whisper a word of counsel, it should be merely this: whatever your present self may be, resolve with all your strength of resolution, never to degenerate thence. Be jealous of a shadow of falling off Determine rather to look above that standard, and to strive beyond it. Every body appreciates certain social properties, and likes his neighbour for possessing them; but perhaps few dwell upon a friend’s capacity for the intellectual, or care how this might expand, if there were but facilities allowed for cultivation, and space given for growth. It seems to me that, even should such space and facilities be denied by stringent circumstances and a rigid fate, still it should do you good fully to know, and tenaciously to remember, that you have such a capacity. When other people overwhelm you with acquired knowledge, such as you have not had opportunity, perhaps not application, to gain—derive not pride, but support from the thought. If no new books had ever been written, some of these minds would themselves have remained blank pages: they only take an impression; they were not born with a record of thought on the brain, or an instinct of sensation on the heart. If I had never seen a printed volume, Nature would have offered my perceptions a varying picture of a continuous narrative, which, without any other teacher than herself, would have schooled me to knowledge, unsophisticated, but genuine.

“Before I received your last, I had made up my mind to tell you that I should expect no letter for three months to come (intending afterwards to extend this abstinence to six months, for I am jealous of becoming dependent on this indulgence: you doubtless cannot see why, because you do not live my life). Nor shall I now expect a letter; but since you say that

you would like to write now and then, I cannot say ‘never write,’ without imposing on my real wishes a falsehood which they reject, and doing to them a violence, to which they entirely refuse to submit. I can only observe that when it pleases you to write, whether seriously or for a little amusement, your notes, if they come to me, will come where they are welcome. Tel---II will try to cultivate good spirits, as assiduously as she cultivates her geraniums.”

CHAPTER X.

Soon after she returned home, her friend paid her a visit. While she stayed at Haworth, Miss Brontë wrote the letter from which the following extract is taken. The strong sense and right feeling displayed in it on the subject of friendship, sufficiently account for the constancy of affection which Miss Brontë earned from all those who once became her friends.

To W. S. Williams, Esq.

"July 21 st, 1851.

"... I could not help wondering whether Cornhill will ever change for me, as Oxford has changed for you. I have some pleasant associations connected with it now—will these alter their character some day?

"Perhaps they may—though I have faith to the contrary, because I think, I do not exaggerate my partialities; I think I take faults along with excellences—blemishes together with beauties. And, besides, in the matter of friendship, I have observed that disappointment here arises chiefly, not from liking our friends too well, or thinking of them too highly, but rather from an over-estimate of their liking for and opinion of us; and that if we guard ourselves with sufficient scrupulousness of care from error in this direction, and can be content, and even happy to give more affection than we receive-can make just comparison of circumstances, and be severely accurate in drawing inferences thence, and never let self-love blind our eyes —I think we may manage to get through life with consistency and constancy, unembittered by that misanthropy which springs from revulsions of feeling. All this sounds a little metaphysical, but it is good sense if you consider it. The moral of it is, that if we would build on a sure foundation in friendship, we must love our friends for *their* sakes rather than for *our own;* we must look at their truth to *themselves,* full as much as their truth to us. In the latter case, every wound to self-love would be a cause of coldness; in

the former, only some painful change in the friend's character and disposition—some fearful breach in his allegiance to his better self—could alienate the heart.

"How interesting your old maiden-cousin's gossip about your parents must have been to you; and how gratifying to find that the reminiscence turned on none but pleasant facts and characteristics! Life must, indeed, be slow in that little decaying hamlet amongst the chalk hills. After all, depend upon it, it is better to be worn out with work in a thronged community, than to perish of inaction in a stagnant solitude: take this truth into consideration whenever you get tired of work and bustle."

I received a letter from her a little later than this; and though there is reference throughout to what I must have said in writing to her, all that it called forth in reply is so peculiarly characteristic, that I cannot prevail upon myself to pass it over without a few extracts:—

"Haworth, Aug. 6th, 1851.

"My dear Mrs. Gaskell,—I was too much pleased with your letter, when I got it at last, to feel disposed to murmur now about the delay.

"About a fortnight ago, I received a letter from Miss Martineau; also a long letter, and treating precisely the same subjects on which yours dwelt, viz., the Exhibition and Thackeray's last lecture. It was interesting mentally to place the two documents side by side—to study the two aspects of mind—to view, alternately, the same scene through two mediums. Full striking was the difference; and the more striking because it was not the rough contrast of good and evil, but the more subtle opposition, the more delicate diversity of different kinds of good. The excellences of one nature resembled (I thought) that of some sovereign medicine—harsh, perhaps, to the taste, but potent to invigorate; the good of the other seemed more akin to the nourishing efficacy of our daily bread. It is not bitter; it is not lusciously sweet: it pleases, without flattering the palate; it sustains, without forcing the strength.

“I very much agree with you in all you say. For the sake of variety, I could almost wish that the concord of opinion were less complete.

“To begin with Trafalgar Square. My taste goes with yours and Meta’s[bx] completely on this point. I have always thought it a fine site (and sight also). The view from the summit of those steps has ever struck me as grand and imposing—Nelson Column included: the fountains I could dispense with. With respect, also, to the Crystal Palace, my thoughts are precisely yours.

“Then I feel sure you speak justly of Thackeray’s lecture. You do well to set aside odious comparisons, and to wax impatient of that trite twaddle about ‘nothing newness’—a jargon which simply proves, in those who habitually use it, a coarse and feeble faculty of appreciation; an inability to discern the relative value of originality and novelty; a lack of that refined perception which, dispensing with the stimulus of an ever-new subject, can derive sufficiency of pleasure from freshness of treatment. To such critics, the prime of a summer morning would bring no delight; wholly occupied with railing at their cook for not having provided a novel and piquant breakfast-dish, they would remain insensible to such influences as lie in sunrise, dew, and breeze: therein would be ‘nothing new.’

“It is Mr.—’s family experience which has influenced your feelings about the Catholics? I own, I cannot be sorry for this commencing change. Good people—*very* good people—I doubt not, there are amongst the Romanists, but the system is not one which should have such sympathy as *yours.* Look at Popery taking off the mask in Naples!

“I have read the ‘Saint’s Tragedy.”[1] As a ‘work of art’ it seems to me far superior to either ‘Alton Locke’ or ‘Yeast.’ Faulty it may be, crude and unequal, yet there are portions where some of the deep chords of human nature are swept with a hand which is strong even while it falters. We see throughout (I think) that Elizabeth has not, and never had, a mind perfectly sane. From the time that she was what she herself, in the exaggeration of her humility, calls ‘an idiot girl,’ to the hour when she lay moaning in visions on her dying bed, a slight craze runs through her whole existence. This is good: this is true. A sound mind, a healthy intellect, would have dashed the priest-power to the wall; would have defended her natural

affections from his grasp, as a lioness defends her young; would have been as true to husband and children, as your leal-hearted little Maggie was to her Frank.by Only a mind weak with some fatal flaw could have been influenced as was this poor saint's. But what anguish—what struggles! Seldom do I cry over books; but here, my eyes rained as I read. When Elizabeth turns her face to the wall—I stopped—there needed no more.

"Deep truths are touched on in this tragedy—touched on, not fully elicited; truths that stir a peculiar pity—a compassion hot with wrath, and bitter with pain. This is no poet's dream: we know that such things *have* been done; that minds *have* been thus subjugated, and lives thus laid waste.

"Remember me kindly and respectfully to Mr. Gaskell, and though I have not seen Marianne, I must beg to include her in the love I send the others. Could you manage to convey a small kiss to that dear, but dangerous little person, Julia? She surreptitiously possessed herself of a minute fraction of my heart, which has been missing ever since I saw her.—Believe me, sincerely and affectionately yours,

"C. BRONTË."

The reference which she makes at the end of this letter is to my youngest little girl, between whom and her a strong mutual attraction existed. The child would steal her little hand into Miss Brontë's scarcely larger one, and each took pleasure in this apparently unobserved caress. Yet once when I told Juliabz to take and show her the way to some room in the house, Miss Brontë shrunk back: "Do not *bid* her do anything for me," she said; "it has been so sweet hitherto to have her rendering her little kindnesses *spontaneously."*

As illustrating her feelings with regard to children, I may give what she says in another of her letters to me.

"Whenever I see Florence and Julia again, I shall feel like a fond but bashful suitor, who views at a distance the fair personage to whom, in his clownish awe, he dare not risk a near approach. Such is the clearest idea I

can give you of my feeling towards children I like, but to whom I am a stranger;—and to what children am I not a stranger? They seem to me little wonders; their talk, their ways are all matter of half-admiring, half-puzzled speculation."

The following is part of a long letter which I received from her, dated September 20th, 1851:—

"... Beautiful are those sentences out of James Martineau's sermons; [2] some of them gems most pure and genuine; ideas deeply conceived, finely expressed. I should like much to see his review of his sister's book. Of all the articles respecting which you question me, I have seen none, except that notable one in the 'Westminster' on the Emancipation of Women.[3] But why are you and I to think (perhaps I should rather say to feel) so exactly alike on some points that there can be no discussion between us? Your words on this paper express my thoughts. Well-argued it is,—clear, logical,—but vast is the hiatus of omission; harsh the consequent jar on every finer chord of the soul. What is this hiatus? I think I know; and, knowing, I will venture to say. I think the writer forgets there is such a thing as self-sacrificing love and disinterested devotion. When I first read the paper, I thought it was the work of a powerful-minded, clear-headed woman, who had a hard, jealous heart, muscles of iron, and nerves of bend leather; of a woman who longed for power, and had never felt affection. To many women affection is sweet, and power conquered indifferent—though we all like influence won. I believe J. S. Mill would make a hard, dry, dismal world of it; and yet he speaks admirable sense through a great portion of his article—especially when he says, that if there be a natural unfitness in women for men's employment, there is no need to make laws on the subject; leave all careers open; let them try; those who ought to succeed will succeed, or, at least, will have a fair chance—the incapable will fall back into their right place. He likewise disposes of the 'maternity' question very neatly. In short, J. S. Mill's head is, I dare say, very good, but I feel disposed to scorn his heart. You are right when you say that there is a large margin in human nature over which the logicians have no dominion; glad am I that it is so.

“I send by this post Ruskin’s ‘Stones of Venice,’ and I hope you and Meta will find passages in it that will please you. Some parts would be dry and technical were it not for the character, the marked individuality which pervades every page. I wish Marianne had come to speak to me at the lecture; it would have given me such pleasure. What you say of that small sprite Julia, amuses me much. I believe you don’t know that she has a great deal of her mama’s nature (modified) in her; yet I think you will find she has as she grows up.

“Will it not be a great mistake, if Mr. Thackeray should deliver his lectures at Manchester under such circumstances and conditions as will exclude people like you and Mr. Gaskell from the number of his audience? I thought his London plan too narrow. Charles Dickens would not thus limit his sphere of action.

“You charge me to write about myself What can I say on that precious topic? My health is pretty good. My spirits are not always alike. Nothing happens to me. I hope and expect little in this world, and am thankful that I do not despond and suffer more. Thank you for inquiring after our old servant; she is pretty well; the little shawl, &c. pleased her much. Papa likewise, I am glad to say, is pretty well; with his and my kindest regards to you and Mr. Gaskell—Believe me sincerely and affectionately yours,

“C. BRONTË.”

Before the autumn was far advanced, the usual effects of her solitary life, and of the unhealthy situation of Haworth Parsonage, began to appear in the form of sick-headaches, and miserable, starting, wakeful nights. She does not dwell on this in her letters; but there is an absence of all cheerfulness of tone, and an occasional sentence forced out of her, which imply far more than many words could say. There was illness all through the Parsonage household—taking its accustomed forms of lingering influenza and low fever; she herself was outwardly the strongest of the family, and all domestic exertion fell for a time upon her shoulders.

To W. S. Williams, Esq.

"Sept. 26th.

"As I laid down your letter, after reading with interest the graphic account it gives of a very striking scene, I could not help feeling with renewed force a truth, trite enough, yet ever impressive; viz., that it is good to be attracted out of ourselves—to be forced to take a near view of the sufferings, the privations, the efforts, the difficulties of others. If we ourselves live in fulness of content, it is well to be reminded that thousands of our fellow-creatures undergo a different lot; it is well to have sleepy sympathies excited, and lethargic selfishness shaken up. If, on the other hand, we be contending with the special grief,—the intimate trial,—the peculiar bitterness with which God has seen fit to mingle our own cup of existence,—it is very good to know that our overcast lot is not singular; it stills the repining word and thought,—it rouses the flagging strength, to have it vividly set before us that there are countless afflictions in the world, each perhaps rivalling—some surpassing—the private pain over which we are too prone exclusively to sorrow.

"All those crowded emigrants had their troubles,—their untoward causes of banishment; you, the looker-on, had 'your wishes and regrets,'—your anxieties, alloying your home happiness and domestic bliss; and the parallel might be pursued further, and still it would be true,—still the same; a thorn in the flesh for each; some burden, some conflict for all.

"How far this state of things is susceptible of amelioration from changes in public institutions,—alterations in national habits,—may and ought to be earnestly considered: but this is a problem not easily solved. The evils, as you point them out, are great, real, and most obvious; the remedy is obscure and vague; yet for such difficulties as spring from over-competition, emigration must be good; the new life in a new country must give a new lease of hope; the wider field, less thickly peopled, must open a new path for endeavour. But I always think great physical powers of exertion and endurance ought to accompany such a step..... I am truly glad to hear that an original writer has fallen in your way. Originality is the pearl of great price in literature,—the rarest, the most precious claim by which an author can be

recommended. Are not your publishing prospects for the coming season tolerably rich and satisfactory? You inquire after ‘Currer Bell.’ It seems to me that the absence of his name from your list of announcements will leave no blank, and that he may at least spare himself the disquietude of thinking he is wanted when it is certainly not his lot to appear.

“Perhaps Currer Bell has his secret moan about these matters; but if so, he will keep it to himself It is an affair about which no words need be wasted, for no words can make a change: it is between him and his position, his faculties and his fate.”

My husband and I were anxious that she should pay us a visit before the winter had set completely in; and she thus wrote, declining our invitation:—

“Nov. 6th.

“If anybody would tempt me from home, you would; but, just now, from home I must not, will not go. I feel greatly better at present than I did three weeks ago. For a month or six weeks about the equinox (autumnal or vernal) is a period of the year which, I have noticed, strangely tries me. Sometimes the strain falls on the mental, sometimes on the physical part of me; I am ill with neuralgic headache, or I am ground to the dust with deep dejection of spirits (not, however, such dejection but I can keep it to myself). That weary time has, I think and trust, got over for this year. It was the anniversary of my poor brother’s death, and of my sister’s failing health: I need say no more.

“As to running away from home every time I have a battle of this sort to fight, it would not do: besides, the ‘weird’ would follow. As to shaking it off, that cannot be. I have declined to go to Mrs.—, to Miss Martineau, and now I decline to go to you. But listen! do not think that I throw your kindness away: or that it fails of doing the good you desire. On the contrary, the feeling expressed in your letter,—proved by your invitation—goes *right home* where you would have it to go, and heals as you would have it to heal.

“Your description of Frederika Bremer[ca] tallies exactly with one I read somewhere, in I know not what book. I laughed out when I got to the mention of Frederika’s special accomplishment, given by you with a distinct simplicity that, to my taste, is what the French would call ‘impayable.’ Where do you find the foreigner who is without some little drawback of this description? It is a pity.”

A visit from Miss Wooler at this period did Miss Brontë much good for the time. She speaks of her guest’s company as being “very pleasant,” “like good wine,” both to her father and to herself. But Miss Wooler could not remain with her long; and then again the monotony of her life returned upon her in all its force; the only events of her days and weeks consisting in the small changes which professional letters brought. It must be remembered that her health was often such as to prevent her stirring out of the house in inclement or wintry weather. She was liable to sore throat, and depressing pain at the chest, and difficulty of breathing, on the least exposure to cold.

A letter from her late visitor touched and gratified her much; it was simply expressive of gratitude for attention and kindness shown to her, but it wound up by saying that she had not for many years experienced so much enjoyment as during the ten days passed at Haworth. This little sentence called out a wholesome sensation of modest pleasure in Miss Brontë’s mind; and she says, “it did me good.”

I find, in a letter to a distant friend,[cb] written about this time, a retrospect of her visit to London. It is too ample to be considered as a mere repetition of what she had said before; and, besides, it shows that her first impressions of what she saw and heard were not crude and transitory, but stood the tests of time and after-thought.

“I spent a few weeks in town last summer, as you have heard; and was much interested by many things I heard and saw there. What now chiefly dwells in my memory are Mr. Thackeray’s lectures, Mademoiselle Rachel’s acting, D’ Aubigné’s, Melville’s, and Maurice’s preaching, and the Crystal Palace.

“Mr. Thackeray’s lectures you will have seen mentioned and commented on in the papers; they were very interesting. I could not always coincide with the sentiment expressed, or the opinions broached; but I admired the gentlemanlike ease, the quiet humour, the taste, the talent, the simplicity, and the originality of the lecturer.

“Rachel’s acting transfixed me with wonder, enchained me with interest, and thrilled me with horror. The tremendous force with which she expresses the very worst passions in their strongest essence forms an exhibition as exciting as the bull-fights of Spain, and the gladiatorial combats of old Rome, and (it seemed to me) not one whit more moral than these poisoned stimulants to popular ferocity It is scarcely human nature that she shows you; it is something wilder and worse; the feelings and fury of a fiend. The great gift of genius she undoubtedly has; but, I fear, she rather abuses it than turns it to good account.

“With all the three preachers I was greatly pleased. Melville seemed to me the most eloquent, Maurice the most in earnest; had I the choice, it is Maurice whose ministry I should frequent.[4] ”On the Crystal Palace I need not comment. You must already have heard too much of it. It struck me at the first with only a vague sort of wonder and admiration; but having one day the privilege of going over it in company with an eminent countryman of yours, Sir David Brewster, and hearing, in his friendly Scotch accent, his lucid explanation of many things that had been to me before a sealed book, I began a little better to comprehend it, or at least a small part of it: whether its final results will equal expectation, I know not.”

Her increasing indisposition subdued her at last, in spite of all her efforts of reason and will. She tried to forget oppressive recollections in writing. Her publishers were importunate for a new work from her pen. “Villette” was begun, but she lacked power to continue it.

“It is not at all likely” (she says) “that my book will be ready at the time you mention. If my health is spared, I shall get on with it as fast as is consistent with its being done, if not well, yet as well as I can do it. Not one

whit faster. When the mood leaves me (it has left me now, without vouchsafing so much as a word or a message when it will return) I put by the MS. and wait till it comes back again. God knows, I sometimes have to wait long—very long it seems to me. Meantime, if I might make a request to you, it would be this. Please to say nothing about my book till it is written, and in your hands. You may not like it. I am not myself elated with it as far as it is gone, and authors, you need not be told, are always tenderly indulgent, even blindly partial to their own. Even if it should turn out reasonably well, still I regard it as ruin to the prosperity of an ephemeral book like a novel, to be much talked of beforehand, as if it were something great. People are apt to conceive, or at least to profess, exaggerated expectation, such as no performance can realise: then ensue disappointment and the due revenge, detraction, and failure. If when I write, I were to think of the critics who, I know, are waiting for Currer Bell, ready 'to break all his bones or ever he comes to the botton of the den,' my hand would fall paralysed on my desk. However, I can but do my best, and then muffle my head in the mantle of Patience, and sit down at her feet and wait."

The "mood" here spoken of did not go off; it had a physical origin. Indigestion, nausea, headache, sleeplessness,—all combined to produce miserable depression of spirits. A little event which occurred about this time, did not tend to cheer her. It was the death of poor old faithful Keeper, Emily's dog. He had come to the Parsonage in the fierce strength of his youth. Sullen and ferocious he had met with his master in the indomitable Emily. Like most dogs of his kind, he feared, respected, and deeply loved her who subdued him. He had mourned her with the pathetic fidelity of his nature, falling into old age after her death. And now, her surviving sister wrote: "Poor old Keeper died last Monday morning, after being ill one night; he went gently to sleep; we laid his old faithful head in the garden. Flossy (the 'fat curly-headed dog') is dull, and misses him. There was something very sad in losing the old dog; yet I am glad he met a natural fate. People kept hinting he ought to be put away, which neither papa nor I liked to think of."

When Miss Brontë wrote this, on December 8th, she was suffering from a bad cold, and pain in her side. Her illness increased, and on December 17th, she—so patient, silent, and enduring of suffering—so afraid of any unselfish taxing of others—had to call to her friend for help:

"I cannot at present go to see you, but I would be grateful if you could come and see me, even were it only for a few days. To speak truth, I have put on but a poor time of it during this month past. I kept hoping to be better, but was at last obliged to have recourse to a medical man. Sometimes I have felt very weak and low, and longed much for society, but could not persuade myself to commit the selfish act of asking you merely for my own relief. The doctor speaks encouragingly, but as yet I get no better. As the illness has been coming on for a long time, it cannot, I suppose, be expected to disappear all at once. I am not confined to bed, but I am weak,—have had no appetite for about three weeks—and my nights are very bad. I am well aware myself that extreme and continuous depression of spirits has had much to do with the origin of the illness; and I know a little cheerful society would do me more good than gallons of medicine. If you can come, come on Friday. Write to-morrow and say whether this be possible, and what time you will be at Keighley, that I may send the gig. I do not ask you to stay long: a few days is all I request."

Of course, her friend went; and a certain amount of benefit was derived from her society, always so grateful to Miss Brontë. But the evil was now too deep-rooted to be more than palliated for a time by "the little cheerful society" for which she so touchingly besought.

A relapse came on before long. She was very ill, and the remedies employed took an unusual effect on her peculiar sensitiveness of constitution. Mr. Brontë was miserably anxious about the state of his only remaining child, for she was reduced to the last degree of weakness, as she had been unable to swallow food for above a week before. She rallied and derived her sole sustenance from half-a-tea-cup of liquid administered by tea-spoonfuls, in the course of the day. Yet she kept out of bed, for her father's sake, and struggled in solitary patience through her worst hours.

When she was recovering, her spirits needed support, and then she yielded to her friend's entreaty that she would visit her. All the time that Miss Brontë's illness had lasted, Miss—had been desirous of coming to her; but she refused to avail herself of this kindness, saying, that "it was enough to burden herself; that it would be misery to annoy another;" and, even at her worst time, she tells her friend, with humorous glee, how coolly she had managed to capture one of Miss—'s letters to Mr. Brontë, which she suspected was of a kind to aggravate his alarm about his daughter's state, "and at once conjecturing its tenor, made its contents her own."

Happily for all parties, Mr. Brontë was wonderfully well this winter; good sleep, good spirits, and an excellent steady appetite, all seemed to mark vigour; and in such a state of health, Charlotte could leave him to spend a week with her friend, without any great anxiety.

She benefited greatly by the kind attentions and cheerful society of the family with whom she went to stay. They did not care for her in the least as "Currer Bell," but had known and loved her for years as Charlotte Brontë. To them her invalid weakness was only a fresh claim upon their tender regard, from the solitary woman, whom they had first known as a little, motherless school-girl.

Miss Brontë wrote to me about this time, and told me something of what she had suffered.

"Feb. 6th, 1852.

"Certainly, the past winter has been to me a strange time; had I the prospect before me of living it over again, my prayer must necessarily be, 'Let this cup pass from me.' That depression of spirits, which I thought was gone by when I wrote last, came back again with a heavy recoil; internal congestion ensued, and then inflammation. I had severe pain in my right side, frequent burning and aching in my chest; sleep almost forsook me, or would never come, except accompanied by ghastly dreams; appetite vanished, and slow fever was my continual companion. It was some time

before I could bring myself to have recourse to medical advice. I thought my lungs were affected, and could feel no confidence in the power of medicine. When, at last, however, a doctor was consulted, he declared my lungs and chest sound, and ascribed all my sufferings to derangement of the liver, on which organ it seems the inflammation had fallen. This information was a great relief to my dear father, as well as to myself; but I had subsequently rather sharp medical discipline to undergo, and was much reduced. Though not yet well, it is with deep thankfulness that I can say, I am *greatly better.* My sleep, appetite, and strength seem all returning."

It was a great interest to her to be allowed an early reading of "Esmond;"[CC] and she expressed her thoughts on the subject, in a criticising letter to Mr. Smith, who had given her this privilege.

"Feb. 14th, 1852.

"My dear Sir,—It has been a great delight to me to read Mr. Thackeray's work; and I so seldom now express my sense of kindness that, for once, you must permit me, without rebuke, to thank you for a pleasure so rare and special. Yet I am not going to praise either Mr. Thackeray or his book. I have read, enjoyed, been interested, and, after all, feel full as much ire and sorrow as gratitude and admiration. And still one can never lay down a book of his without the last two feelings having their part, be the subject or treatment what it may. In the first half of the book, what chiefly struck me was the wonderful manner in which the writer throws himself into the spirit and letters of the times whereof he treats; the allusions, the illustrations, the style, all seem to me so masterly in their exact keeping, their harmonious consistency, their nice, natural truth, their pure exemption from exaggeration. No second-rate imitator can write in that way; no coarse scene-painter can charm us with an allusion so delicate and perfect. But what bitter satire, what relentless dissection of diseased subjects! Well, and this, too, is right, or would be right, if the savage surgeon did not seem so fiercely pleased with his work. Thackeray likes to dissect an ulcer or an aneurism; he has pleasure in putting his cruel knife or probe into quivering,

living flesh. Thackeray would not like all the world to be good: no great satirist would like society to be perfect.

"As usual, he is unjust to women; quite unjust. There is hardly any punishment he does not deserve for making Lady Castlewood peep through a keyhole, listen at a door, and be jealous of a boy and a milkmaid. Many other things I noticed that, for my part, grieved and exasperated me as I read; but then, again, came passages so true, so deeply thought, so tenderly felt, one could not help forgiving and admiring.

* * * * * *

But I wish he could be told not to care much for dwelling on the political or religious intrigues of the times. Thackeray, in his heart, does not value political or religious intrigues of any age or date. He likes to show us human nature at home, as he himself daily sees it; his wonderful observant faculty likes to be in action. In him this faculty is a sort of captain and leader; and if ever any passage in his writings lacks interest, it is when this master-faculty is for a time thrust into a subordinate position. I think such is the case in the former half of the present volume. Towards the middle, he throws off restraint, becomes himself, and is strong to the close. Everything now depends on the second and third volumes. If, in pith and interest, they fall short of the first, a true success cannot ensue. If the continuation be an improvement upon the commencement, if the stream gather force as it rolls, Thackeray will triumph. Some people have been in the habit of terming him the second writer of the day;[cd] it just depends on himself whether or not these critics shall be justified in their award. He need not be the second. God made him second to no man. If I were he, I would show myself as I am, not as critics report me; at any rate, I would do my best. Mr. Thackeray is easy and indolent, and seldom cares to do his best. Thank you once more; and believe me yours sincerely.

"C. BRONTË."

Miss Brontë's health continued such, that she could not apply herself to writing as she wished, for many weeks after the serious attack from which she had suffered. There was not very much to cheer her in the few events that touched her interests during this time. She heard in March of the death of a friend's relation in the Colonies; and we see something of what was the corroding dread at her heart.

"The news of E—'s death[ce] came to me last week in a letter from M—; a long letter, which wrung my heart so, in its simple, strong, truthful emotion, I have only ventured to read it once. It ripped up half-scarred wounds with terrible force. The death-bed was just the same,—breath failing, &c. She fears she shall now, in her dreary solitude, become a 'stern, harsh, selfish woman.' This fear struck home; again and again have I felt it for myself, and what is my position to M—'s? May God help her, as God only can help!"

Again and again, her friend urged her to leave home; nor were various invitations wanting to enable her to do this, when these constitutional accesses of low spirits preyed too much upon her in her solitude. But she would not allow herself any such indulgence unless it became absolutely necessary from the state of her health. She dreaded the perpetual recourse to such stimulants as change of scene and society, because of the reaction that was sure to follow. As far as she could see, her life was ordained to be lonely, and she must subdue her nature to her life, and, if possible, bring the two into harmony. When she could employ herself in fiction, all was comparatively well. The characters were her companions in the quiet hours, which she spent utterly alone, unable often to stir out of doors for many days together. The interests of the persons in her novels supplied the lack of interest in her own life; and Memory and Imagination found their appropriate work, and ceased to prey upon her vitals. But too frequently she could not write, could not see her people, nor hear them speak; a great mist of headache had blotted them out; they were non existent to her.

This was the case all through the present spring; and anxious as her publishers were for its completion, "Villette" stood still. Even her letters to

her friend are scarce and brief. Here and there I find a sentence in them which can be extracted, and which is worth preserving.

“M——’s letter is very interesting; it shows a mind one cannot but truly admire. Compare its serene trusting strength, with poor —’s vacillating dependence. When the latter was in her first burst of happiness, I never remember the feeling finding vent in expressions of gratitude to God. There was always a continued claim upon your sympathy in the mistrust and doubt she felt of her own bliss. M—believes ; her faith is grateful and at peace; yet while happy in herself, how thoughtful she is for others!”

“March 23rd, 1852.

“You say, dear E—, that you often wish I would chat on paper, as you do. How can I? Where are my materials? Is my life fertile in subjects of chat? What callers do I see? What visits do I pay? No, you must chat, and I must listen, and say ‘Yes,’ and ‘No,’ and ‘Thank you!’ for five minutes’ recreation.

* * * * * *

“I am amused at the interest you take in politics. Don’t expect to rouse me; to me, all ministries and all oppositions seem to be pretty much alike. D‘Israeli was factious as leader of the Opposition; Lord John Russell is going to be factious, now that he has stepped into D’Israeli’s shoes. Lord Derby’s ‘Christian love and spirit,’ is worth three half-pence farthing.”

To *W.S. Williams*, Esq.

“March 25th, 1852.

“My dear Sir,—Mr. Smith intimated a short time since, that he had some thoughts of publishing a reprint of ‘Shirley.’ Having revised the work, I now enclose the errata. I have likewise sent off to-day, per rail, a return-box of Cornhill books.

“I have lately read with great pleasure, ‘The Two Families.’ This work, it seems, should have reached me in January; but owing to a mistake, it was detained at the Dead Letter Office, and lay there nearly two months. I liked the commencement very much; the close seemed to me scarcely equal to ‘Rose Douglas.’[5] I thought the authoress committed a mistake in shifting the main interest from the two personages on whom it first rests—viz., Ben Wilson and Mary—to other characters of quite inferior conception. Had she made Ben and Mary her hero and heroine, and continued the development of their fortunes and characters in the same truthful natural vein in which she commences it, an excellent, even an original, book might have been the result. As for Lilias and Ronald, they are mere romantic figments, with nothing of the genuine Scottish peasant about them; they do not even speak the Caledonian dialect; they palaver like a fine lady and gentleman.

“I ought long since to have acknowledged the gratification with which I read Miss Kavanagh’s ‘Women of Christianity.’[6] Her charity and (on the whole) her impartiality are very beautiful. She touches, indeed, with too gentle a hand the theme of Elizabeth of Hungary; and, in her own mind, she evidently misconstrues the fact of Protestant charities *seeming* to be fewer than Catholic. She forgets, or does not know, that Protestantism is a quieter creed than Romanism; as it does not clothe its priesthood in scarlet, so neither does it set up its good women for saints, canonize their names, and proclaim their good works. In the records of man, their almsgiving will not perhaps be found registered, but Heaven has its account as well as earth.

“With kind regards to yourself and family, who, I trust, have all safely weathered the rough winter lately past, as well as the east winds, which are still nipping our spring in Yorkshire,—I am, my dear Sir, yours sincerely,

“C. BRONTË.”

“April 3rd, 1852.

“My dear Sir,—The box arrived quite safely, and I very much thank you for the contents, which are most kindly selected.

“As you wished me to say what I thought of ‘The School for Fathers,’ I hastened to read it. The book seems to me clever, interesting, very amusing, and likely to please generally. There is a merit in the choice of ground, which is not yet too hackneyed; the comparative freshness of subject, character, and epoch give the tale a certain attractiveness. There is also, I think, a graphic rendering of situations, and a lively talent for describing whatever is visible and tangible—what the eye meets on the surface of things. The humour appears to me such as would answer well on the stage; most of the scenes seem to demand dramatic accessories to give them their full effect. But I think one cannot with justice bestow higher praise than this. To speak candidly, I felt, in reading the tale, a wondrous hollowness in the moral and sentiment; a strange dillettante shallowness in the purpose and feeling. After all, ‘Jack’ is not much better than a ‘Tony Lumpkin,’cf and there is no very great breadth of choice between the clown he is and the fop his father would have made him. The grossly material life of the old English fox-hunter, and the frivolous existence of the fine gentleman present extremes each in its way so repugnant, that one feels half inclined to smile when called upon to sentimentalize over the lot of a youth forced to pass from one to the other; torn from the stables, to be ushered perhaps into the ball-room. Jack dies mournfully indeed, and you are sorry for the poor fellow’s untimely end; but you cannot forget that, if he had not been thrust into the way of Colonel Penruddock’s weapon, he might possibly have broken his neck in a fox-hunt. The character of Sir Thomas Warren is excellent; consistent throughout. That of Mr. Addison not bad, but sketchy, a mere outline—wanting colour and finish. The man’s portrait is there, and his costume, and fragmentary anecdotes of his life; but where is the man’s nature—soul and self? I say nothing about the female characters—not one word; only that Lydia seems to me like a pretty little actress, prettily dressed, gracefully appearing and disappearing, and reappearing in a genteel comedy, assuming the proper sentiments of her part with all due tact and naivete, and—that is all.

“Your description of the model man of business is true enough, I doubt not; but we will not fear that society will ever be brought quite to this

standard; human nature (bad as it is) has, after all, elements that forbid it. But the very tendency to such a consummation—the marked tendency, I fear, of the day—produces, no doubt, cruel suffering. Yet, when the evil of competition passes a certain limit, must it not in time work its own cure? I suppose it will, but then through some convulsed crisis, shattering all around it like an earthquake. Meantime, for how many is life made a struggle; enjoyment and rest curtailed; labour terribly enhanced beyond almost what nature can bear! I often think that this world would be the most terrible of enigmas, were it not for the firm belief that there is a world to come, where conscientious effort and patient pain will meet their reward.—Believe me, my dear Sir, sincerely yours,

"C. BRONTË."

A letter to her old Brussels schoolfellow gives a short retrospect of the dreary winter she had passed through.

"Haworth, April 12th, 1852.

".... I struggled through the winter, and the early part of the spring, often with great difficulty. My friend stayed with me a few days in the early part of January; she could not be spared longer. I was better during her visit, but had a relapse soon after she left me, which reduced my strength very much. It cannot be denied that the solitude of my position fearfully aggravated its other evils. Some long stormy days and nights there were, when I felt such a craving for support and companionship as I cannot express. Sleepless, I lay awake night after night, weak and unable to occupy myself I sat in my chair day after day, the saddest memories my only company. It was a time I shall never forget; but God sent it, and it must have been for the best.

"I am better now; and very grateful do I feel for the restoration of tolerable health; but, as if there was always to be some affliction, papa, who enjoyed wonderful health during the whole winter, is ailing with his spring attack of bronchitis. I earnestly trust it may pass over in the comparatively ameliorated form in which it has hitherto shown itself.

“Let me not forget to answer your question about the cataract. Tell your papa that my father was seventy at the time he underwent an operation; he was most reluctant to try the experiment; could not believe that, at his age, and with his want of robust strength, it would succeed. I was obliged to be very decided in the matter, and to act entirely on my own responsibility. Nearly six years have now elapsed since the cataract was extracted (it was not merely depressed); he has never once during that time regretted the step, and a day seldom passes that he does not express gratitude and pleasure at the restoration of that inestimable privilege of vision whose loss he once knew.”

I had given Miss Brontë, in one of my letters, an outline of the story on which I was then engaged,[cg] and in reply she says:—

“The sketch you give of your work (respecting which I am, of course, dumb) seems to me very noble; and its purpose may be as useful in practical result as it is high and just in theoretical tendency. Such a book may restore hope and energy to many who thought they had forfeited their right to both; and open a clear course for honourable effort to some who deemed that they and all honour had parted company in this world.

“Yet hear my protest!

“Why should she die? Why are we to shut up the book weeping?

“My heart fails me already at the thought of the pang it will have to undergo. And yet you must follow the impulse of your own inspiration. If that commands the slaying of the victim, no bystander has a right to put out his hand to stay the sacrificial knife: but I hold you a stern priestess in these matters.”

As the milder weather came on, her health improved, and her power of writing increased. She set herself with redoubled vigour to the work before her; and denied herself pleasure for the purpose of steady labour. Hence she writes to her friend:—

“May 11th.

“Dear E—,—I must adhere to my resolution of neither visiting nor being visited at present. Stay you quietly at B., till you go to S., as I shall stay at Haworth; as sincere a farewell can be taken with the heart as with the lips, and perhaps less painful. I am glad the weather is changed; the return of the southwest wind suits me; but I hope you have no cause to regret the departure of your favourite east wind. What you say about—ch does not surprise me; I have had many little notes (whereof I answer about one in three) breathing the same spirit,—self and child the sole all-absorbing topics, on which the changes are rung even to weariness. But I suppose one must not heed it, or think the case singular. Nor, I am afraid, must one expect her to improve. I read in a French book lately, a sentence to this effect, that ‘marriage might be defined as the state of two-fold selfishness.’ Let the single therefore take comfort. Thank you for Mary’s letter. She *does* seem most happy; and I cannot tell you how much more real, lasting, and better-warranted her happiness seems than ever—’s did. I think so much of it is in herself, and her own serene, pure, trusting, religious nature.—’s always gives me the idea of a vacillating, unsteady rapture, entirely dependent on circumstances with all their fluctuations. If Mary lives to be a mother, you will then see a greater difference.

“I wish you, dear E., all health and enjoyment in your visit; and, as far as one can judge at present, there seems a fair prospect of the wish being realised.

“Yours sincerely,

“C. BRONTË.”

CHAPTER XI.

The reader will remember that Anne Brontë had been interred in the churchyard of the Old Church at Scarborough. Charlotte had left directions for a tombstone to be placed over her; but many a time during the solitude of the past winter, her sad, anxious thoughts had revisited the scene of that last great sorrow, and she had wondered whether all decent services had been rendered to the memory of the dead, until at last, she came to a silent resolution to go and see for herself whether the stone and inscription were in a satisfactory state of preservation.

"Cliffe House, Filey, June 6th, 1852.

"Dear E—,—I am at Filey utterly alone. Do not be angry, the step is right. I considered it, and resolved on it with due deliberation. Change of air was necessary; there were reasons why I should not go to the south, and why I should come here. On Friday I went to Scarborough, visited the churchyard and stone. It must be refaced and relettered; there are five errors. I gave the necessary directions. That duty, then, is done; long has it lain heavy on my mind; and that was a pilgrimage I felt I could only make alone.

"I am in our old lodgings at Mrs. Smith's; not, however, in the same rooms, but in less expensive apartments. They seemed glad to see me, remembered you and me very well, and, seemingly, with great good will. The daughter who used to wait on us is just married. Filey seems to me much altered; more lodging-houses—some of them very handsome—have been built; the sea has all its old grandeur. I walk on the sands a good deal, and try not to feel desolate and melancholy. How sorely my heart longs for you, I need not say. I have bathed once; it seemed to do me good. I may, perhaps, stay here a fortnight. There are as yet scarcely any visitors. A Lady Wenlock is staying at the large house of which you used so vigilantly to observe the inmates. One day I set out with intent to trudge to Filey Bridge, but was frightened back by two cows. I mean to try again some morning. I left papa well. I have been a good deal troubled with headache, and with some pain in the side since I came here, but I feel that this has been owing

to the cold wind, for very cold has it been till lately; at present I feel better. Shall I send the papers to you as usual? Write again directly, and tell me this, and anything and everything else that comes into your mind.

“Believe me, yours faithfully,

“C. BRONTË”

“Filey, June 16th, 1852.

“Dear E—,—Be quite easy about me. I really think I am better for my stay at Filey; that I have derived more benefit from it than I dared to anticipate. I believe, could I stay here two months, and enjoy something like social cheerfulness as well as exercise and good air, my health would be quite renewed. This, however, cannot possibly be; but I am most thankful for the good received. I stay here another week.

“I return—’s letter. I am sorry for her: I believe she suffers; but I do not much like her style of expressing herself..... Grief as well as joy manifests itself in most different ways in different people; and I doubt not she is sincere and in earnest when she talks of her ‘precious, sainted father;’ but I could wish she used simpler language.”

Soon after her return from Filey, she was alarmed by a very serious and sharp attack of illness with which Mr. Brontë was seized. There was some fear, for a few days, that his sight was permanently lost and his spirits sank painfully under this dread.

“This prostration of spirits,” writes his daughter, “which accompanies anything like a relapse is almost the most difficult point to manage. Dear E —, you are tenderly kind in offering your society; but rest very tranquil where you are; be fully assured that it is not now, nor under present circumstances, that I feel the lack either of society or occupation; my time is pretty well filled up, and my thoughts appropriated..... I cannot permit myself to comment much on the chief contents of your last; advice is not necessary: as far as I can judge, you seem hitherto enabled to take these

trials in a good and wise spirit. I can only pray that such combined strength and resignation may be continued to you. Submission, courage, exertion, when practicable,—these seem to be the weapons with which we must fight life's long battle."

I suppose that, during the very time when her thoughts were thus fully occupied with anxiety for her father, she received some letter from her publishers, making inquiry as to the progress of the work which they knew she had in hand, as I find the following letter to Mr. Williams, bearing reference to some of Messrs. Smith and Elder's proposed arrangements.

"To W. S. Williams, Esq.

"July 28th, 1852.

"My dear Sir,—Is it in contemplation to publish the new edition of 'Shirley' soon? Would it not be better to defer it for a time? In reference to a part of your letter, permit me to express this wish,—and I trust in doing so, I shall not be regarded as stepping out of my position as an author, and encroaching on the arrangements of business,—viz.: that no announcement of a new work by the author of 'Jane Eyre' shall be made till the MS. of such work is actually in my publisher's hands. Perhaps we are none of us justified in speaking very decidedly where the future is concerned; but for some too much caution in such calculations can scarcely be observed: amongst this number I must class myself. Nor, in doing so, can I assume an apologetic tone. He does right who does his best.

"Last autumn I got on for a time quickly. I ventured to look forward to spring as the period of publication: my health gave way; I passed such a winter as, having been once experienced, will never be forgotten. The spring proved little better than a protraction of trial. The warm weather and a visit to the sea have done me much good physically; but as yet I have recovered neither elasticity of animal spirits, nor flow of the power of composition. And if it were otherwise, the difference would be of no avail;

my time and thoughts are at present taken up with close attendance on my father, whose health is just now in a very critical state, the heat of the weather having produced determination of blood to the head.

"I am, yours sincerely,

"C. BRONTË."

Before the end of August, Mr. Brontë's convalescence became quite established, and he was anxious to resume his duties for some time before his careful daughter would permit him.

On September the 14th the "great duke" died. He had been, as we have seen, her hero from childhood; but I find no further reference to him at this time than what is given in the following extract from a letter to her friend:—

"I do hope and believe the changes you have been having this summer will do you permanent good, notwithstanding the pain with which they have been too often mingled. Yet I feel glad that you are soon coming home; and I really must not trust myself to say how much I wish the time were come when, without let or hindrance, I could once more welcome you to Haworth. But oh! I don't get on; I feel fretted—incapable—sometimes very low. However, at present, the subject must not be dwelt upon; it presses me too hardly—nearly—and painfully. Less than ever can I taste or know pleasure till this work is wound up. And yet I often sit up in bed at night, thinking of and wishing for you. Thank you for the 'Times'; what it said on the mighty and mournful subject was well said. All at once the whole nation seems to take a just view of that great character. There was a review too of an American book, which I was glad to see. Read 'Uncle Tom's Cabin':[ci] probably, though, you have read it.

"Papa's health continues satisfactory, thank God! As for me, my wretched liver has been disordered again of late, but I hope it is now going to be on

better behaviour; it hinders me in working—depresses both power and tone of feeling. I must expect this derangement from time to time."

Haworth was in an unhealthy state, as usual; and both Miss Brontë and Tabby suffered severely from the prevailing epidemics. The former was long in shaking off the effects of this illness. In vain she resolved against allowing herself any society or change of scene until she had accomplished her labour. She was too ill to write; and with illness came on the old heaviness of heart, recollections of the past, and anticipations of the future. At last Mr. Brontë expressed so strong a wish that her friend should be asked to visit her, and she felt some little refreshment so absolutely necessary, that on October the 9th she begged her to come to Haworth, just for a single week.

"I thought I would persist in denying myself till I had done my work, but I find it won't do; the matter refuses to progress, and this excessive solitude presses too heavily; so let me see your dear face, E., just for one reviving week."

But she would only accept of the company of her friend for the exact time specified. She thus writes to Miss Wooler on October the 21st:—

"E—has only been my companion one little week. I would not have her any longer, for I am disgusted with myself and my delays; and consider it was a weak yielding to temptation in me to send for her at all; but in truth, my spirits were getting low—prostrate sometimes—and she has done me inexpressible good. I wonder when I shall see you at Haworth again; both my father and the servants have again and again insinuated a distinct wish that you should be requested to come in the course of the summer and autumn, but I have always turned rather a deaf ear; 'not yet,' was my thought,' 'I want first to be free;' work first, then pleasure."

Miss—'s visit had done her much good. Pleasant companionship during the day produced, for the time, the unusual blessing of calm repose at night; and, after her friend's departure, she was well enough to "fall to business," and write away, almost incessantly, at her story of "Villette," now drawing to a conclusion. The following letter to Mr. Smith, seems to have accompanied the first part of the MS.

"Oct. 30th, 1852.

"My dear Sir,—You must notify honestly what you think of 'Villette' when you have read it. I can hardly tell you how I hunger to hear some opinion besides my own, and how I have sometimes desponded, and almost despaired, because there was no one to whom to read a line, or of whom to ask a counsel. 'Jane Eyre' was not written under such circumstances, nor were two-thirds of 'Shirley.' I got so miserable about it, I could bear no allusion to the book. It is not finished yet; but now I hope. As to the anonymous publication, I have this to say: If the withholding of the author's name should tend materially to injure the publisher's interest, to interfere with booksellers' orders, &c., I would not press the point; but if no such detriment is contingent, I should be most thankful for the sheltering shadow of an incognito. I seem to dread the advertisements—the large-lettered 'Currer Bell's New Novel,' or 'New Work, by the Author of Jane Eyre.' These, however, I feel well enough, are the transcendentalisms of a retired wretch; so you must speak frankly..... I shall be glad to see 'Colonel Esmond.' My objection to the second volume lay here: I thought it contained decidedly too much history—too little story."

In another letter, referring to "Esmond," she uses the following words:—

"The third volume seemed to me to possess the most sparkle, impetus, and interest. Of the first and second my judgment was, that parts of them were admirable; but there was the fault of containing too much History—too little Story. I hold that a work of fiction ought to be a work of creation; that the real should be sparingly introduced in pages dedicated to the ideal. Plain household bread is a far more wholesome and necessary thing than

cake; yet who would like to see the brown loaf placed on the table for dessert? In the second volume, the author gives us an ample supply of excellent brown bread; in his third, only such a portion as gives substance, like the crumbs of bread in a well-made, not too rich, plum-pudding."

Her letter to Mr. Smith, containing the allusion to "Esmond," which reminded me of the quotation just given, continues:—

"You will see that 'Villette' touches on no matter of public interest. I cannot write books handling the topics of the day; it is of no use trying. Nor can I write a book for its moral. Nor can I take up a philanthropic scheme, though I honour philanthropy; and voluntarily and sincerely veil my face before such a mighty subject as that handled in Mrs. Beecher Stowe's work, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' To manage these great matters rightly, they must be long and practically studied—their bearings known intimately, and their evils felt genuinely; they must not be taken up as a business matter, and a trading speculation. I doubt not Mrs. Stowe had felt the iron of slavery enter into her heart, from childhood upwards, long before she ever thought of writing books. The feeling throughout her work is sincere, and not got up. Remember to be an honest critic of 'Villette,' and tell Mr. Williams to be unsparing: not that I am likely to alter anything, but I want to know his impressions and yours."

To G. Smith, Esq.

"Nov. 3rd.

"My dear Sir,—I feel very grateful for your letter; it relieved me much, for I was a good deal harassed by doubts as to how 'Villette' might appear in other eyes than my own. I feel in some degree authorised to rely on your favourable impressions, because you are quite right where you hint disapprobation. You have exactly hit two points at least where I was conscious of defect;—the discrepancy, the want of perfect harmony, between Graham's boyhood and manhood,—the angular abruptness of his

change of sentiment towards Miss Fanshawe. You must remember, though, that in secret he had for some time appreciated that young lady at a somewhat depressed standard—held her a little lower than the angels. But still the reader ought to have been better made to feel this preparation towards a change of mood. As to the publishing arrangements, I leave them to Cornhill. There is, undoubtedly, a certain force in what you say about the inexpediency of affecting a mystery which cannot be sustained; so you must act as you think is for the best. I submit, also, to the advertisements in large letters, but under protest, and with a kind of ostrich-longing for concealment. Most of the third volume is given to the development of the 'crabbed Professor's' character. Lucy must not marry Dr. John; he is far too youthful, handsome, bright-spirited, and sweet-tempered; he is a 'curled darling' of Nature and of Fortune, and must draw a prize in life's lottery. His wife must be young, rich, pretty; he must be made very happy indeed. If Lucy marries anybody, it must be the Professor—a man in whom there is much to forgive, much to 'put up with.' But I am not leniently disposed towards Miss Frost: from the beginning, I never meant to appoint her lines in pleasant places. The conclusion of this third volume is still a matter of some anxiety: I can but do my best, however. It would speedily be finished, could I ward off certain obnoxious headaches, which, whenever I get into the spirit of my work, are apt to seize and prostrate me.....

"Colonel Henry Esmond is just arrived. He looks very antique and distinguished in his Queen Anne's garb; the periwig, sword, lace, and ruffles are very well represented by the old 'Spectator' type."

In reference to a sentence towards the close of this letter, I may mention what she told me; that Mr. Brontë was anxious that her new tale should end well, as he disliked novels which left a melancholy impression upon the mind; and he requested her to make her hero and heroine (like the heroes and heroines in fairy-tales) "marry, and live very happily ever after." But the idea of M. Paul Emanuel's death at sea was stamped on her imagination till it assumed the distinct force of reality; and she could no more alter her fictitious ending than if they had been facts which she was relating. All she could do in compliance with her father's wish was so to veil the fate in

oracular words, as to leave it to the character and discernment of her readers to interpret her meaning.

To W. S. Williams, Esq.

“Nov. 6th, 1852.

“My dear Sir,—I must not delay thanking you for your kind letter, with its candid and able commentary on ‘Villette.’ With many of your strictures I concur. The third volume may, perhaps, do away with some of the objections; others still remain in force. I do not think the interest culminates anywhere to the degree you would wish. What climax there is does not come on till near the conclusion; and even then, I doubt whether the regular novel-reader will consider the ‘agony piled sufficiently high’ (as the Americans say), or the colours dashed on to the canvass with the proper amount of daring. Still, I fear, they must be satisfied with what is offered: my palette affords no brighter tints; were I to attempt to deepen the reds, or burnish the yellows, I should but botch.

“Unless I am mistaken, the emotion of the book will be found to be kept throughout in tolerable subjection. As to the name of the heroine, I can hardly express what subtlety of thought made me decide upon giving her a cold name; but, at first, I called her ‘Lucy Snowe’ (spelt with an ‘e’); which Snowe I afterwards changed to ’Frost.’ Subsequently, I rather regretted the change, and wished it

‘Snowe’ again. If not too late, I should like the alteration to be made now throughout the MS. A cold name she must have; partly, perhaps, on the ‘lucus a non lucendo’ principle—[7] partly on that of the ‘fitness of things,’ for she has about her an external coldness.

“You say that she may be thought morbid and weak, unless the history of her life be more fully given. I consider that she is both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid. It was no impetus of healthy feeling which urged her to the confessional, for instance;

it was the semi-delirium of solitary grief and sickness. If, however, the book does not express all this, there must be a great fault somewhere. I might explain away a few other points, but it would be too much like drawing a picture and then writing underneath the name of the object intended to be represented. We know what sort of a pencil that is which needs an ally in the pen.

“Thanking you again for the clearness and fulness with which you have responded to my request for a statement of impressions, I am, my dear Sir, yours very sincerely,

“C. BRONTË.

“I trust the work will be seen in MS. by no one except Mr. Smith and yourself.”

“Nov. 10th, 1852.

“My dear Sir,—I only wished the publication of ‘Shirley’ to be delayed till ’Villette’ was nearly ready; so that there can now be no objection to its being issued whenever you think fit. About putting the MS. into type, I can only say that, should I be able to proceed with the third volume at my average rate of composition, and with no more than the average amount of interruptions, I should hope to have it ready in about three weeks. I leave it to you to decide whether it would be better to delay the printing that space of time, or to commence it immediately. It would certainly be more satisfactory if you were to see the third volume before printing the first and the second; yet, if delay is likely to prove injurious, I do not think it is indispensable. I have read the third volume of ‘Esmond.’ I found it both entertaining and exciting to me; it seems to possess an impetus and excitement beyond the other two,—that movement and brilliancy its predecessors sometimes wanted, never fails here. In certain passages, I thought Thackeray used all his powers; their grand, serious force yielded a profound satisfaction. ‘At last he puts forth his strength,’ I could not help saying to myself No character in the book strikes me as more masterly than that of Beatrix; its conception is fresh, and its delineation vivid. It is

peculiar; it has impressions of a new kind—new, at least, to me. Beatrix is not, in herself, all bad. So much does she sometimes reveal of what is good and great as to suggest this feeling—you would think she was urged by a fate. You would think that some antique doom presses on her house, and that once in so many generations its brightest ornament was to become its greatest disgrace. At times, what is good in her struggles against this terrible destiny, but the Fate conquers. Beatrix cannot be an honest woman and a good man's wife. She 'tries, and she cannot.' Proud, beautiful, and sullied, she was born what she becomes, a king's mistress. I know not whether you have seen the notice in the 'Leader;' I read it just after concluding the book. Can I be wrong in deeming it a notice tame, cold, and insufficient ? With all its professed friendliness, it produced on me a most disheartening impression. Surely, another sort of justice than this will be rendered to 'Esmond' from other quarters. One acute remark of the critic is to the effect that Blanche Amory and Beatrix are identical—sketched from the same original! To me they are about as identical as a weazel and a royal tigress of Bengal—both the latter are quadrupeds,—both the former, women. But I must not take up either your time or my own with further remarks. Believe me yours sincerely,

"C. BRONTË."

On a Saturday, a little later in this month, Miss Brontë completed "Villette," and sent it off to her publishers. "I said my prayers when I had done it. Whether it is well or ill done, I don't know; D. V, I will now try and wait the issue quietly. The book, I think, will not be considered pretentious; nor is it of a character to excite hostility."

As her labour was ended, she felt at liberty to allow herself a little change. There were several friends anxious to see her and welcome her to their homes: Miss Martineau, Mrs. Smith, and her own faithful E—. With the last, in the same letter as that in which she announced the completion of "Villette," she offered to spend a week. She began, also, to consider whether it might not be well to avail herself of Mrs. Smith's kind invitation, with a view to the convenience of being on the spot to correct the proofs.

The following letter is given, not merely on account of her own criticisms on “Villette,” but because it shows how she had learned to magnify the meaning of trifles, as all do who live a self-contained and solitary life. Mr. Smith had been unable to write by the same post as that which brought the money for “Villette,” and she consequently received it without a line. The friend with whom she was staying says, that she immediately fancied there was some disappointment about “Villette,” or that some word or act of hers had given offence;[8] and had not the Sunday intervened, and so allowed time for Mr. Smith’s letter to make its appearance, she would certainly have crossed it on her way to London.

“Dec. 6th, 1852.

“My dear Sir,—The receipts have reached me safely. I received the first on Saturday, enclosed in a cover without a line, and had made up my mind to take the train on Monday, and go up to London to see what was the matter, and what had struck my publisher mute. On Sunday morning your letter came, and you have thus been spared the visitation of the unannounced and unsummoned apparition of Currer Bell in Cornhill. Inexplicable delays should be avoided when possible, for they are apt to urge those subjected to their harassment to sudden and impulsive steps. I must pronounce you right again, in your complaint of the transfer of interest in the third volume, from one set of characters to another. It is not pleasant, and it will probably be found as unwelcome to the reader, as it was, in a sense, compulsory upon the writer. The spirit of romance would have indicated another course, far more flowery and inviting; it would have fashioned a paramount hero, kept faithfully with him, and made him supremely worshipful; he should have been an idol, and not a mute, unresponding idol either; but this would have been unlike real life—inconsistent with truth—at variance with probability. I greatly apprehend, however, that the weakest character in the book is the one I aimed at making the most beautiful; and, if this be the case, the fault lies in its wanting the germ of the real—in its being purely imaginary. I felt that this

character lacked substance; I fear that the reader will feel the same. Union with it resembles too much the fate of Ixion, who was mated with a cloud. The childhood of Paulina is, however, I think, pretty well imagined, but her . . . .” (the remainder of this interesting sentence is torn off the letter). “A brief visit to London becomes thus more practicable, and if your mother will kindly write, when she has time, and name a day after Christmas which will suit her, I shall have pleasure, papa’s health permitting, in availing myself of her invitation. I wish I could come in time to correct some at least of the proofs; it would save trouble.”

CHAPTER XII.

The difficulty that presented itself most strongly to me, when I first had the honour of being requested to write this biography, was how I could show what a noble, true, and tender woman Charlotte Brontë really was, without mingling up with her life too much of the personal history of her nearest and most intimate friends. After much consideration of this point, I came to the resolution of writing truly, if I wrote at all; of withholding nothing, though some things, from their very nature, could not be spoken of so fully as others.

One of the deepest interests of her life centres naturally round her marriage, and the preceding circumstances; but more than all other events (because of more recent date, and concerning another as intimately as herself, it requires delicate handling on my part, lest I intrude too roughly on what is most sacred to memory. Yet I have two reasons, which seem to me good and valid ones, for giving some particulars of the course of events which led to her few months of wedded life—that short spell of exceeding happiness. The first is my desire to call attention to the fact that Mr. Nicholls was one who had seen her almost daily for years; seen her as a daughter, a sister, a mistress and a friend. He was not a man to be attracted by any kind of literary fame. I imagine that this, by itself, would rather repel him when he saw it in the possession of a woman. He was a grave, reserved, conscientious man, with a deep sense of religion, and of his duties as one of its ministers.

In silence he had watched her, and loved her long. The love of such a man—a daily spectator of her manner of life for years—is a great testimony to her character as a woman.

How deep his affection was I scarcely dare to tell, even if I could in words. She did not know—she had hardly begun to suspect—that she was the object of any peculiar regard on his part, when, in this very December, he came one evening to tea. After tea, she returned from the study to her

own sitting-room, as was her custom, leaving her father and his curate together. Presently she heard the study-door open, and expected to hear the succeeding clash of the front door. Instead, came a tap; and, “like lightning, it flashed upon me what was coming. He entered. He stood before me. What his words were you can imagine; his manner you can hardly realise, nor can I forget it. He made me, for the first time, feel what it costs a man to declare affection when he doubts response.... The spectacle of one, ordinarily so statue-like, thus trembling, stirred, and overcome, gave me a strange shock. I could only entreat him to leave me then, and promise a reply on the morrow. I asked if he had spoken to Papa. He said he dared not. I think I half led, half put him out of the room.”

So deep, so fervent, and so enduring was the affection Miss Bronte had inspired in the heart of this good man! It is an honour to her; and, as such, I have thought it my duty to speak thus much, and quote thus fully from her letter about it. And now I pass to my second reason for dwelling on a subject which may possibly be considered by some, at first sight, of too private a nature for publication. When Mr. Nicholls had left her, Charlotte went immediately to her father and told him all. He always disapproved of marriages, and constantly talked against them. But he more than disapproved at this time; he could not bear the idea of this attachment of Mr. Nicholls to his daughter. Fearing the consequences of agitation to one so recently an invalid, she made haste to give her father a promise that, on the morrow, Mr. Nicholls should have a distinct refusal. Thus quietly and modestly did she, on whom such hard judgments had been passed by ignorant reviewers, receive this vehement, passionate declaration of love,—thus thoughtfully for her father, and unselfishly for herself, put aside all consideration of how she should reply, excepting as he wished![1]

The immediate result of Mr. Nicholls’ declaration of attachment was, that he sent in his resignation of the curacy of Haworth; and that Miss Brontë held herself simply passive as far as words and actions went, while she suffered acute pain from the strong expressions which her father used in speaking of Mr. Nicholls, and from the too evident distress and failure of health on the part of the latter. Under these circumstances she more gladly

than ever availed herself of Mrs. Smith’s proposal, that she should again visit them in London; and thither she accordingly went in the first week of the year 1853.

From thence I received the following letter. It is with a sad, proud pleasure I copy her words of friendship now.

“January 12th, 1853.

“It is with you the ball rests. I have not heard from you since I wrote last; but I thought I knew the reason of your silence, viz. application to work,—and therefore I accept it, not merely with resignation, but with satisfaction.

“I am now in London, as the date above will show; staying very quietly at my publisher‘s, and correcting proofs, &c. Before receiving yours, I had felt, and expressed to Mr. Smith, reluctance to come in the way of ‘Ruth;’ not that I think she would suffer from contact with ‘Villette’—we know not but that the damage might be the other way; but I have ever held comparisons to be odious, and would fain that neither I nor my friends should be made subjects for the same. Mr. Smith proposes, accordingly, to defer the publication of my book till the 24th inst.; he says that will give ‘Ruth’ the start in the papers daily and weekly, and also will leave free to her all the February magazines. Should this delay appear to you insufficient, speak! and it shall be protracted.

“I dare say, arrange as we may, we shall not be able wholly to prevent comparisons; it is the nature of some critics to be invidious; but we need not care: we can set them at defiance; they shall not make us foes, they shall not mingle with our mutual feelings one taint of jealousy: there is my hand on that; I know you will give clasp for clasp.

“ ‘Villette’ has indeed no right to push itself before ‘Ruth.’ There is a goodness, a philanthropic purpose, a social use in the latter, to which the former cannot for an instant pretend; nor can it claim precedence on the ground of surpassing power: I think it much quieter than ‘Jane Eyre.’

* * * * * *

“I wish to see you, probably at least as much as you can wish to see me, and therefore shall consider your invitation for March as an engagement; about the close of that month, then, I hope to pay you a brief visit. With kindest remembrances to Mr. Gaskell and all your precious circle, I am,” &c.

This visit at Mrs. Smith’s was passed more quietly than any previous one, and was consequently more in accordance with her own tastes. She saw things rather than persons; and being allowed to have her own choice of sights, she selected the “real in preference to the decorative side of life.” She went over two prisons,—one ancient, the other modern,—Newgate and Pentonville; over two hospitals, the Foundling and Bethlehem. She was also taken, at her own request, to see several of the great City sights; the Bank, the Exchange, Rothschild’s, &c.

The power of vast yet minute organization, always called out her respect and admiration. She appreciated it more fully than most women are able to do. All that she saw during this last visit to London impressed her deeply—so much so as to render her incapable of the immediate expression of her feelings, or of reasoning upon her impressions while they were so vivid. If she had lived, her deep heart would sooner or later have spoken out on these things.

What she saw dwelt in her thoughts, and lay heavy on her spirits. She received the utmost kindness from her hosts, and had the old, warm, and grateful regard for them. But looking back, with the knowledge of what was then the future, which Time has given, one cannot but imagine that there was a toning-down in preparation for the final farewell to these kind friends, whom she saw for the last time on a Wednesday morning in February. She met her friend E—at Keighley on her return, and the two proceeded to Haworth together.

“Villette”—which, if less interesting as a mere story than “Jane Eyre,” displays yet more of the extraordinary genius of the author—was received with one burst of acclamation. Out of so small a circle of characters, dwelling in so dull and monotonous an area as a “pension,” this wonderful tale was evolved!

See how she receives the good tidings of her success!

“Feb. 15th, 1853.

“I got a budget of no less than seven papers yesterday and to-day. The import of all the notices is such as to make my heart swell with thankfulness to Him, who takes note both of suffering, and work, and motives. Papa is pleased too. As to friends in general, I believe I can love them still, without expecting them to take any large share in this sort of gratification. The longer I live, the more plainly I see that gentle must be the strain on fragile human nature; it will not bear much.”

I suspect that the touch of slight disappointment, perceptible in the last few lines, arose from her great susceptibility to an opinion she valued much,—that of Miss Martineau, who, both in an article on “Villette” in the “Daily News,” and in a private letter to Miss Brontë, wounded her to the quick by expressions of censure which she believed to be unjust and unfounded, but which, if correct and true, went deeper than any merely artistic fault.[2] An author may bring himself to believe that he can bear blame with equanimity, from whatever quarter it comes; but its force is derived altogether from the character of this. To the public, one reviewer may be the same impersonal being as another; but an author has frequently a far deeper significance to attach to opinions. They are the verdicts of those whom he respects and admires, or the mere words of those for whose judgment he cares not a jot. It is this knowledge of the individual worth of the reviewer’s opinion, which makes the censures of some sink so deep, and prey so heavily upon an author’s heart. And thus, in proportion to her true, firm regard for Miss Martineau, did Miss Brontë suffer under what she considered her misjudgment, not merely of writing, but of character.

She had long before asked Miss Martineau to tell her whether she considered that any want of womanly delicacy or propriety was betrayed in “Jane Eyre.” And on receiving Miss Martineau’s assurance that she did not, Miss Brontë entreated her to declare it frankly if she thought there was any failure of this description in any future work of “Currer Bell’s.” The

promise then given of faithful truth-speaking, Miss Martineau fulfilled when “Villette” appeared. Miss Brontë writhed under what she felt to be injustice.

This seems a fitting place to state how utterly unconscious she was of what was, by some, esteemed coarse in her writings. One day, during that visit at the Briery when I first met her, the conversation turned upon the subject of women’s writing fiction; and some one remarked on the fact that, in certain instances, authoresses had much outstepped the line which men felt to be proper in works of this kind. Miss Brontë said she wondered how far this was a natural consequence of allowing the imagination to work too constantly; Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth and I expressed our belief that such violations of propriety were altogether unconscious on the part of those to whom reference had been made. I remember her grave, earnest way of saying, “I trust God will take from me whatever power of invention or expression I may have, before He lets me become blind to the sense of what is fitting or unfitting to be said!”

Again, she was invariably shocked and distressed when she heard of any disapproval of “Jane Eyre” on the ground above-mentioned. Some one said to her in London, “You know, you and I, Miss Brontë, have both written naughty books!” She dwelt much on this; and, as if it weighed on her mind, took an opportunity to ask Mrs. Smith, as she would have asked a mother—if she had not been motherless from earliest childhood—whether, indeed, there was anything so wrong in “Jane Eyre.”

I do not deny for myself the existence of coarseness here and there in her works, otherwise so entirely noble. I only ask those who read them to consider her life,—which has been openly laid bare before them,—and to say how it could be otherwise. She saw few men; and among these few were one or two with whom she had been acquainted since early girlhood, —who had shown her much friendliness and kindness,—through whose family she had received many pleasures,—for whose intellect she had a great respect,—but who talked before her, if not to her, with as little reticence as Rochester talked to Jane Eyre. Take this in connection with her poor brother’s sad life, and the out-spoken people among whom she lived, —remember her strong feeling of the duty of representing life as it really is, not as it ought to be,—and then do her justice for all that she was, and all

that she would have been (had God spared her), rather than censure her because circumstances forced her to touch pitch, as it were, and by it her hand was for a moment defiled. It was but skin deep. Every change in her life was purifying her; it hardly could raise her. Again I cry, “If she had but lived!”

The misunderstanding with Miss Martineau on account of “Villette,” was the cause of bitter regret to Miss Brontë. Her woman’s nature had been touched, as she thought, with insulting misconception; and she had dearly loved the person who had thus unconsciously wounded her. It was but in the January just past that she had written as follows, in reply to a friend, the tenor of whose letter we may guess from this answer:—

“I read attentively all you say about Miss Martineau; the sincerity and constancy of your solicitude touch me very much; I should grieve to neglect or oppose your advice, and yet I do not feel it would be right to give Miss Martineau up entirely. There is in her nature much that is very noble; hundreds have forsaken her,[3] more, I fear, in the apprehension that their fair names may suffer, if seen in connection with hers, than from any pure convictions, such as you suggest, of harm consequent on her fatal tenets. With these fair-weather friends I cannot bear to rank; and for her sin, is it not one of those of which God and not man must judge?

“To speak the truth, my dear Miss—, I believe, if you were in my place, and knew Miss Martineau as I do,—if you had shared with me the proofs of her genuine kindliness, and had seen how she secretly suffers from abandonment,—you would be the last to give her up; you would separate the sinner from the sin, and feel as if the right lay rather in quietly adhering to her in her strait, while that adherence is unfashionable and unpopular, than in turning on her your back when the world sets the example. I believe she is one of those whom opposition and desertion make obstinate in error; while patience and tolerance touch her deeply and keenly, and incline her to ask of her own heart whether the course she has been pursuing may not possibly be a faulty course.”

Kindly and faithful words! which Miss Martineau never knew of; to be repaid in words more grand and tender, when Charlotte lay deaf and cold by

her dead sisters. In spite of their short, sorrowful misunderstanding, they were a pair of noble women and faithful friends.

I turn to a pleasanter subject. While she was in London, Miss Brontë had seen Lawrence's portrait of Mr. Thackeray, and admired it extremely. Her first words, after she had stood before it some time in silence, were, "And there came up a Lion out of Judah!" The likeness was by this time engraved, and Mr. Smith sent her a copy of it.

To G. Smith, Esq.

"Haworth, Feb. 26th, 1853.

"My dear Sir,—At a late hour yesterday evening I had the honour of receiving, at Haworth Parsonage, a distinguished guest, none other than W M. Thackeray, Esq. Mindful of the rites of hospitality, I hung him up in state this morning. He looks superb in his beautiful, tasteful gilded gibbet. For companion he has the Duke of Wellington, (do you remember giving me that picture?) and for contrast and foil Richmond's portrait of an unworthy individual, who, in such society, must be nameless. Thackeray looks away from the latter character with a grand scorn, edifying to witness. I wonder if the giver of these gifts will ever see them on the walls where they now hang; it pleases me to fancy that one day he may. My father stood for a quarter of an hour this morning examining the great man's picture. The conclusion of his survey was, that he thought it a puzzling head; if he had known nothing previously of the original's character, he could not have read it in his features. I wonder at this. To me the broad brow seems to express intellect. Certain lines about the nose and cheek betray the satirist and cynic; the mouth indicates a childlike simplicity—perhaps even a degree of irresoluteness, inconsistency—weakness in short, but a weakness not unamiable. The engraving seems to me very good. A certain not quite Christian expression—'not to put too fine a point upon it'—an expression of spite, most vividly marked in the original, is here softened, and perhaps a

little—a very little—of the power has escaped in this ameliorating process. Did it strike you thus?”

Miss Brontë was in much better health during this winter of 1852-3, than she had been the year before.

“For my part,” (she wrote to me in February) “I have thus far borne the cold weather well. I have taken long walks on the crackling snow, and felt the frosty air bracing. This winter has, for me, not been like last winter. December, January, February, ‘51-2, passed like a long stormy night, conscious of one painful dream, all solitary grief and sickness. The corresponding months in ’52-3 have gone over my head quietly and not uncheerfully. Thank God for the change and the repose! How welcome it has been He only knows! My father too has borne the season well; and my book, and its reception thus far, have pleased and cheered him.”

In March the quiet Parsonage had the honour of receiving a visit from the then Bishop of Ripon. He remained one night with Mr. Brontë. In the evening, some of the neighbouring clergy were invited to meet him at tea and supper; and during the latter meal, some of the “curates” began merrily to upbraid Miss Brontë with “putting them into a book;” and she, shrinking from thus having her character as authoress thrust upon her at her own table, and in the presence of a stranger, pleasantly appealed to the bishop as to whether it was quite fair thus to drive her into a corner. His Lordship, I have been told, was agreeably impressed with the gentle unassuming manners of his hostess, and with the perfect propriety and consistency of the arrangements in the modest household. So much for the Bishop’s recollection of his visit. Now we will turn to hers.

“March 4th.

“The Bishop has been, and is gone. He is certainly a most charming Bishop; the most benignant gentleman that ever put on lawn sleeves; yet stately too, and quite competent to check encroachments. His visit passed capitally well; and at its close, as he was going away, he expressed himself

thoroughly gratified with all he had seen. The Inspector has been also in the course of the past week; so that I have had a somewhat busy time of it. If you could have been at Haworth to share the pleasures of the company, without having been inconvenienced by the little bustle of the preparation, I should have been very glad. But the house was a good deal put out of its way, as you may suppose; all passed, however, orderly, quietly, and well. Martha waited very nicely, and I had a person to help her in the kitchen. Papa kept up, too, fully as well as I expected, though I doubt whether he could have borne another day of it. My penalty came on in a strong headache as soon as the Bishop was gone: how thankful I was that it had patiently waited his departure. I continue stupid to-day: of course, it is the re-action consequent on several days of extra exertion and excitement. It is very well to talk of receiving a Bishop without trouble, but you must prepare for him."

By this time some of the Reviews had begun to find fault with "Villette." Miss Brontë made her old request.

To W. S. Williams, Esq.

"My dear Sir,—Were a review to appear, inspired with treble their animus, pray do not withhold it from me. I like to see the satisfactory notices,—especially I like to carry them to my father; but I must see such as are unsatisfactory and hostile; these are for my own especial edification;—it is in these I best read public feeling and opinion. To shun examination into the dangerous and disagreeable seems to me cowardly. I long always to know what really is, and am only unnerved when kept in the dark....

"As to the character of 'Lucy Snowe,' my intention from the first was that she should not occupy the pedestal to which 'Jane Eyre' was raised by some injudicious admirers. She is where I meant her to be, and where no charge of self-laudation can touch her.

"The note you sent this morning from Lady Harriette St. Clair, is precisely to the same purport as Miss Muloch's[ck] request,—an application for exact and authentic information respecting the fate of M. Paul Emanuel! You see how much the ladies think of this little man, whom you none of

you like. I had a letter the other day, announcing that a lady of some note, who had always determined that whenever she married, her husband should be the counterpart of ‘Mr. Knightly’ in Miss Austen’s ‘Emma,’ had now changed her mind, and vowed that she would either find the duplicate of Professor Emanuel, or remain for ever single! I have sent Lady Harriette an answer so worded as to leave the matter pretty much where it was. Since the little puzzle amuses the ladies, it would be a pity to spoil their sport by giving them the key.”

When Easter, with its duties arising out of sermons to be preached by strange clergymen, who had afterwards to be entertained at the Parsonage, —with Mechanics’ Institute Meetings, and school tea-drinkings, was over and gone, she came, at the close of April, to visit us in Manchester. We had a friend, a young lady, staying with us. Miss Brontë had expected to find us alone; aud although our friend was gentle and sensible after Miss Brontë’s own heart, yet her presence was enough to create a nervous tremour. I was aware that both of our guests were unusually silent; and I saw a little shiver run from time to time over Miss Brontë’s frame. I could account for the modest reserve of the young lady; and the next day Miss Brontë told me how the unexpected sight of a strange face had affected her.

It was now two or three years since I had witnessed a similar effect produced on her, in anticipation of a quiet evening at Fox-How; and since then she had seen many and various people in London: but the physical sensations produced by shyness were still the same; and on the following day she laboured under severe headaches. I had several opportunities of perceiving how this nervousness was ingrained in her constitution, and how acutely she suffered in striving to overcome it. One evening we had, among other guests, two sisters who sang Scottish ballads exquisitely. Miss Brontë had been sitting quiet and constrained till they began “The Bonnie House of Airlie,” but the effect of that and “Carlisle Yetts,” which followed, was as irresistible as the playing of the Piper of Hamelin. The beautiful clear light came into her eyes; her lips quivered with emotion; she forgot herself, rose, and crossed the room to the piano, where she asked eagerly for song after song. The sisters begged her to come and see them the next morning, when they would sing as long as ever she liked; and she promised gladly and thankfully. But on reaching the house her courage failed. We walked some

time up and down the street; she upbraiding herself all the while for folly, and trying to dwell on the sweet echoes in her memory rather than on the thought of a third sister who would have to be faced if we went in. But it was of no use; and dreading lest this struggle with herself might bring on one of her trying headaches, I entered at last and made the best apology I could for her non-appearance. Much of this nervous dread of encountering strangers I ascribed to the idea of her personal ugliness, which had been strongly impressed upon her imagination early in life, and which she exaggerated to herself in a remarkable manner. “I notice,” said she, “that after a stranger has once looked at my face, he is careful not to let his eyes wander to that part of the room again!” A more untrue idea never entered into any one’s head. Two gentlemen who saw her during this visit, without knowing at the time who she was, were singularly attracted by her appearance; and this feeling of attraction towards a pleasant countenance, sweet voice, and gentle timid manners, was so strong in one as to conquer a dislike he had previously entertained to her works.

There was another circumstance that came to my knowledge at this period which told secrets about the finely-strung frame. One night I was on the point of relating some dismal ghost story, just before bed-time. She shrank from hearing it, and confessed that she was superstitious, and prone at all times to the involuntary recurrence of any thoughts of ominous gloom which might have been suggested to her. She said that on first coming to us, she had found a letter on her dressing-table from a friend in Yorkshire, containing a story which had impressed her vividly ever since;—that it mingled with her dreams at night, and made her sleep restless and unrefreshing.

One day we asked two gentlemen to meet her at dinner, expecting that she and they would have a mutual pleasure in making each other’s acquaintance. To our disappointment, she drew back with timid reserve from all their advances, replying to their questions and remarks in the briefest manner possible; till at last they gave up their efforts to draw her into conversation in despair, and talked to each other and my husband on subjects of recent local interest. Among these Thackeray’s Lectures (which had lately been delivered in Manchester) were spoken of, and that on Fielding especially dwelt upon. One gentleman objected to it strongly, as

calculated to do moral harm, and regretted that a man having so great an influence over the tone of thought of the day, as Thackeray, should not more carefully weigh his words. The other took the opposite view. He said that Thackeray described men from the inside, as it were; through his strong power of dramatic sympathy, he identified himself with certain characters, felt their temptations, entered into their pleasures, &c. This roused Miss Brontë, who threw herself warmly into the discussion; the ice of her reserve was broken, and from that time she showed her interest in all that was said, and contributed her share to any conversation that was going on in the course of the evening.

What she said, and which part she took, in the dispute about Thackeray's lecture, may be gathered from the following letter, referring to the same subject:—

"The Lectures arrived safely; I have read them through twice. They must be studied to be appreciated. I thought well of them when I heard them delivered, but now I see their real power, and it is great. The lecture on Swift was new to me; I thought it almost matchless. Not that by any means I always agree with Mr. Thackeray's opinions, but his force, his penetration, his pithy simplicity, his eloquence,—his manly sonorous eloquence—command entire admiration.... Against his errors I protest, were it treason to do so. I was present at the Fielding lecture: the hour spent in listening to it was a painful hour. That Thackeray was wrong in his way of treating Fielding's character and vices, my conscience told me. After reading that lecture, I trebly felt that he was wrong—dangerously wrong. Had Thackeray owned a son, grown, or growing up, and a son, brilliant but reckless—would he have spoken in that light way of courses that lead to disgrace and the grave? He speaks of it all as if he theorised; as if he had never been called on, in the course of his life, to witness the actual consequences of such failings; as if he had never stood by and seen the issue, the final result of it all. I believe, if only once the prospect of a promising life blasted on the outset by wild ways had passed close under his eyes, he never could have spoken with such levity of what led to its piteous destruction. Had I a brother yet living, I should tremble to let him read Thackeray's lecture on Fielding. I should hide it away from him. If, in spite of precaution, it should fall into his hands, I should earnestly pray him not

to be misled by the voice of the charmer, let him charm never so wisely. Not that for a moment I would have had Thackeray to abuse Fielding, or even Pharisaically to condemn his life; but I do most deeply grieve that it never entered into his heart sadly and nearly to feel the peril of such a career, that he might have dedicated some of his great strength to a potent warning against its adoption by any young man. I believe temptation often assails the finest manly natures; as the pecking sparrow or destructive wasp attacks the sweetest and mellowest fruit, eschewing what is sour and crude. The true lover of his race ought to devote his vigour to guard and protect; he should sweep away every lure with a kind of rage at its treachery. You will think this far too serious, I dare say; but the subject is serious, and one cannot help feeling upon it earnestly."

CHAPTER XIII.

After her visit to Manchester, she had to return to a reopening of the painful circumstances of the previous winter, as the time drew near for Mr. Nicholls' departure from Haworth. A testimonial of respect from the parishioners was presented, at a public meeting, to one who had faithfully served them for eight years: and he left the place, and she saw no chance of hearing a word about him in the future, unless it was some second-hand scrap of intelligence, dropped out accidentally by one of the neighbouring clergymen.

I had promised to pay her a visit on my return from London in June; but, after the day was fixed, a letter came from Mr. Brontë, saying that she was suffering from so severe an attack of influenza, accompanied with such excruciating pain in the head, that he must request me to defer my visit until she was better. While sorry for the cause, I did not regret that my going was delayed till the season when the moors would be all glorious with the purple bloom of the heather; and thus present a scene about which she had often spoken to me. So we agreed that I should not come to her before August or September. Meanwhile, I received a letter from which I am tempted to take an extract, as it shows both her conception of what fictitious writing ought to be, and her always kindly interest in what I was doing.

"July 9th, 1853.

"Thank you for your letter; it was as pleasant as a quiet chat, as welcome as spring showers, as reviving as a friend's visit; in short, it was very like a page of 'Cranford.' ... * A thought strikes me. Do you, who have so many friends,—so large a circle of acquaintance,—find it easy, when you sit down to write, to isolate yourself from all those ties, and their sweet associations, so as to be your own woman, uninfluenced or swayed by the consciousness of how your work may affect other minds; what blame or what sympathy it may call forth? *Gaskell's novel was serialized in Dickens's *Household Words* (1851-1853). Does no luminous cloud ever

come between you and the severe Truth, as you know it in your own secret and clear-seeing soul? In a word, are you never tempted to make your characters more amiable than the Life, by the inclination to assimilate your thoughts to the thoughts of those who always feel kindly, but sometimes fail to see justly? Don't answer the question; it is not intended to be answered..... Your account of Mrs. Stowe was stimulatingly interesting. I long to see you, to get you to say it, and many other things, all over again. My father continues better. I am better too; but to-day I have a headache again, which will hardly let me write coherently. Give my dear love to M. and M., dear happy girls as they are. You cannot now transmit my message to F. and J. I prized the little wild-newer, —not that I think the sender cares for me; she does not, and cannot, for she does not know me;—but no matter. In my reminiscences she is a person of a certain distinction. I think hers a fine little nature, frank and of genuine promise. I often see her, as she appeared, stepping supreme from the portico towards the carriage, that evening we went to see 'Twelfth Night.' I believe in J.'s future; I like what speaks in her movements, and what is written upon her face."

Towards the latter end of September I went to Haworth. At the risk of repeating something which I have previously said, I will copy out parts of a letter which I wrote at the time.

"It was a dull, drizzly Indian-inky day, all the way on the railroad to Keighley, which is a rising wool-manufacturing town, lying in a hollow between hills—not a pretty hollow, but more what the Yorkshire people call a 'bottom,' or 'botham.' I left Keighley in a car for Haworth, four miles off —four tough, steep, scrambling miles, the road winding between the wave-like hills that rose and fell on every side of the horizon, with a long illimitable sinuous look, as if they were a part of the line of the Great Serpent, which the Norse legend says girdles the world. The day was lead-coloured; the road had stone factories alongside of it,—grey, dull-coloured rows of stone cottages belonging to these factories, and then we came to poor, hungry-looking fields;—stone fences everywhere, and trees nowhere. Haworth is a long, straggling village: one steep narrow street—so steep that

the flag-stones with which it is paved are placed end-ways, that the horses' feet may have something to cling to, and not slip down backwards; which, if they did, they would soon reach Keighley. But if the horses had cats' feet and claws, they would do all the better. Well, we (the man, horse, car, and I) clambered up this street, and reached the church dedicated to St. Autest (who was he?); then we turned off into a lane on the left, past the curate's lodging at the Sexton's, past the school-house, up to the Parsonage yard-door. I went round the house to the front door, looking to the church;—moors everywhere beyond and above. The crowded grave-yard surrounds the house and small grass enclosure for drying clothes.

"I don't know that I ever saw a spot more exquisitely clean; the most dainty place for that I ever saw. To be sure, the life is like clockwork. No one comes to the house; nothing disturbs the deep repose; hardly a voice is heard; you catch the ticking of the clock in the kitchen, or the buzzing of a fly in the parlour, all over the house. Miss Brontë sits alone in her parlour; breakfasting with her father in his study at nine o'clock. She helps in the housework; for one of their servants, Tabby, is nearly ninety, and the other only a girl. Then I accompanied her in her walks on the sweeping moors: the heather-bloom had been blighted by a thunderstorm a day or two before, and was all of a livid brown colour, instead of the blaze of purple glory it ought to have been. Oh! those high, wild, desolate moors, up above the whole world, and the very realms of silence! Home to dinner at two. Mr. Brontë has dinner sent into him. All the small table arrangements had the same dainty simplicity about them. Then we rested, and talked over the clear, bright fire; it is a cold country, and the fires were a pretty warm dancing light all over the house. The parlour has been evidently refurnished within the last few years, since Miss Brontë's success has enabled her to have a little more money to spend. Everything fits into, and is in harmony with, the idea of a country parsonage, possessed by people of very moderate means. The prevailing colour of the room is crimson, to make a warm setting for the cold grey landscape without. There is her likeness by Richmond, and an engraving from Lawrence's picture of Thackeray; and two recesses, on each side of the high, narrow, old-fashioned mantelpiece, filled with books,—books given to her, books she has bought, and which tell of her individual pursuits and tastes; not standard books.

“She cannot see well, and does little beside knitting. The way she weakened her eyesight was this: When she was sixteen or seventeen, she wanted much to draw; and she copied nimini-pimini copper-plate engravings out of annuals; (‘stippling,’ don’t the artists call it?) every little point put in, till at the end of six months she had produced an exquisitely faithful copy of the engraving. She wanted to learn to express her ideas by drawing. After she had tried to draw stories, and not succeeded, she took the better mode of writing; but in so small a hand, that it is almost impossible to decipher what she wrote at this time.

“But now to return to our quiet hour of rest after dinner. I soon observed that her habits of order were such that she could not go on with the conversation, if a chair was out of its place; everything was arranged with delicate regularity. We talked over the old times of her childhood; of her elder sister’s (Maria’s) death,—just like that of Helen Burns in ‘Jane Eyre;’ of those strange, starved days at school; of the desire (almost amounting to illness) of expressing herself in some way,—writing or drawing; of her weakened eyesight, which prevented her doing anything for two years, from the age of seventeen to nineteen; of her being a governess; of her going to Brussels; whereupon I said I disliked Lucy Snowe, and we discussed M. Paul Emanuel; and I told her of—’s admiration of ‘Shirley,’ which pleased her, for the character of Shirley was meant for her sister Emily, about whom she is never tired of talking, nor I of listening. Emily must have been a remnant of the Titans,—great—grand—daughter of the giants who used to inhabit earth. One day, Miss Brontë brought down a rough, common-looking oil-painting, done by her brother, of herself,—a little, rather prim-looking girl of eighteen,—and the two other sisters, girls of sixteen and fourteen, with cropped hair, and sad, dreamy-looking eyes. . . . . Emily had a great dog,—half mastiff, half bull-dog,—so savage, &c. . . . . This dog went to her funeral, walking side by side with her father; and then, to the day of its death, it slept at her room door, snuffing under it, and whining every morning.

“We have generally had another walk before tea, which is at six; at half-past eight, prayers; and by nine, all the household are in bed, except ourselves. We sit up together till ten, or past; and after I go, I hear Miss Brontë come down and walk up and down the room for an hour or so.”

Copying this letter has brought the days of that pleasant visit very clear before me,—very sad in their clearness. We were so happy together; we were so full of interest in each other's subjects. The day seemed only too short for what we had to say and to hear. I understood her life the better for seeing the place where it had been spent—where she had loved and suffered. Mr. Brontë was a most courteous host; and when he was with us, —at breakfast in his study, or at tea in Charlotte's parlour,—he had a sort of grand and stately way of describing past times, which tallied well with his striking appearance. He never seemed quite to have lost the feeling that Charlotte was a child to be guided and ruled, when she was present; and she herself submitted to this with a quiet docility that half amused, half astonished me. But when she had to leave the room, then all his pride in her genius and fame came out. He eagerly listened to everything I could tell him of the high admiration I had at any time heard expressed for her works. He would ask for certain speeches over and over again, as if he desired to impress them on his memory.

I remember two or three subjects of the conversations which she and I held in the evenings, besides those alluded to in my letter.

I asked her whether she had ever taken opium, as the description given of its effects in "Villette" was so exactly like what I had experienced, —vivid and exaggerated presence of objects, of which the outlines were indistinct, or lost in golden mist, &c. She replied, that she had never, to her knowledge, taken a grain of it in any shape, but that she had followed the process she always adopted when she had to describe anything which had not fallen within her own experience; she had thought intently on it for many and many a night before falling to sleep,—wondering what it was like or how it would be,—till at length, sometimes after the progress of her story had been arrested at this one point for weeks, she wakened up in the morning with all clear before her, as if she had in reality gone through the experience, and then could describe it, word for word, as it had happened. I cannot account for this psychologically; I only am sure that it was so, because she said it.

She made many inquiries as to Mrs. Stowe's personal appearance; and it evidently harmonised well with some theory of hers, to hear that the author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was small and slight. It was another theory of hers,

that no mixtures of blood produced such fine characters, mentally and morally, as the Scottish and English.

I recollect, too, her saying how accutely she dreaded a charge of plagiarism, when, after she had written “Jane Eyre,” she read the thrilling effect of the mysterious scream at midnight in Mrs. Marsh’s story of the “Deformed.” She also said that, when she read the “Neighbours,” she thought every one would fancy that she must have taken her conception of Jane Eyre’s character from that of “Francesca,” the narrator of Miss Bremer’s story.[4] For my own part, I cannot see the slightest resemblance between the two characters, and so I told her; but she persisted in saying that Francesca was Jane Eyre married to a good-natured “Bear” of a Swedish surgeon.

We went, not purposely, but accidentally, to see various poor people in our distant walks. From one we had borrowed an umbrella; in the house of another we had taken shelter from a rough September storm. In all these cottages, her quiet presence was known. At three miles from her home, the chair was dusted for her, with a kindly “Sit ye down, Miss Brontë;” and she knew what absent or ailing members of the family to inquire after. Her quiet, gentle words, few though they might be, were evidently grateful to those Yorkshire ears. Their welcome to her, though rough and curt, was sincere and hearty.

We talked about the different courses through which life ran. She said, in her own composed manner, as if she had accepted the theory as a fact, that she believed some were appointed beforehand to sorrow and much disappointment; that it did not fall to the lot of all—as Scripture told us—to have their lines fall in pleasant places; that it was well for those who had rougher paths, to perceive that such was God’s will concerning them, and try to moderate their expectations, leaving hope to those of a different doom, and seeking patience and resignation as the virtues they were to cultivate. I took a different view: I thought that human lots were more equal than she imagined; that to some happiness and sorrow came in strong patches of light and shadow, (so to speak,) while in the lives of others they were pretty equally blended throughout. She smiled, and shook her head, and said she was trying to school herself against ever anticipating any

pleasure; that it was better to be brave and submit faithfully; there was some good reason, which we should know in time, why sorrow and disappointment were to be the lot of some on earth. It was better to acknowledge this, and face out the truth in a religious faith.

In connection with this conversation, she named a little abortive plan which I had not heard of till then; how, in the previous July, she had been tempted to join some friends (a married couple and their child)[cl] in an excursion to Scotland. They set out joyfully; she with especial gladness, for Scotland was a land which had its roots deep down in her imaginative affections, and the glimpse of two days at Edinburgh was all she had as yet seen of it. But, at the first stage after Carlisle, the little yearling child was taken with a slight indisposition; the anxious parents fancied that strange diet disagreed with it, and hurried back to their Yorkshire home as eagerly as, two or three days before, they had set their faces northward, in hopes of a month's pleasant ramble.

We parted with many intentions, on both sides, of renewing very frequently the pleasure we had had in being together. We agreed that when she wanted bustle, or when I wanted quiet, we were to let each other know, and exchange visits as occasion required.

I was aware that she had a great anxiety on her mind at this time; and being acquainted with its nature, I could not but deeply admire the patient docility which she displayed in her conduct towards her father.

Soon after I left Haworth, she went on a visit to Miss Wooler, who was then staying at Hornsea. The time passed quietly and happily with this friend, whose society was endeared to her by every year.

To Miss Wooler.

"Dec. 12th, 1853.

"I wonder how you are spending these long winter evenings. Alone, probably, like me. The thought often crosses me, as I sit by myself, how pleasant it would be if you lived within a walking distance, and I could go to you sometimes, or have you to come and spend a day and night with me.

Yes; I did enjoy that week at Hornsea, and I look forward to spring as the period when you will fulfil your promise of coming to visit me. I fear you must be very solitary at Hornsea. How hard to some people of the world it would seem to live your life! how utterly impossible to live it with a serene spirit and an unsoured disposition! It seems wonderful to me, because you are not, like Mrs.—, phlegmatic and impenetrable, but received from nature feelings of the very finest edge. Such feelings, when they are locked up, sometimes damage the mind and temper. They don't with you. It must be partly principle, partly self-discipline, which keeps you as you are."

Of course, as I draw nearer to the years so recently closed, it becomes impossible for me to write with the same fulness of detail as I have hitherto not felt it wrong to use. Miss Brontë passed the winter of 1853-4 in a solitary and anxious manner. But the great conqueror Time was slowly achieving his victory over strong prejudice and human resolve. By degrees Mr. Brontë became reconciled to the idea of his daughter's marriage.[5]

There is one other letter, addressed to Mr. Dobell, which developes the intellectual side of her character, before we lose all thought of the authoress in the timid and conscientious woman about to become a wife, and in the too short, almost perfect, happiness of her nine months of wedded life.

"Haworth, near Keighley,

"Feb. 3rd, 1854.

"My dear Sir,—I can hardly tell you how glad I am to have an opportunity of explaining that taciturnity to which you allude. Your letter came at a period of danger and care, when my father was very ill, and I could not leave his bedside. I answered no letters at that time, and yours was one of three or four that, when leisure returned to me, and I came to consider their purport, it seemed to me such that the time was passed for answering them, and I laid them finally aside. If you remember, you asked me to go to London; it was too late either to go or to decline. I was sure you had left

London. One circumstance you mentioned—your wife's illness—which I have thought of many a time, and wondered whether she is better. In your present note you do not refer to her, but I trust her health has long ere now been quite restored.

" 'Balder' arrived safely.[cm] I looked at him, before cutting his leaves, with singular pleasure. Remembering well his elder brother, the potent 'Roman,' it was natural to give a cordial welcome to a fresh scion of the same house and race. I have read him. He impressed me thus: he teems with power; I found in him a wild wealth of life, but I thought his favourite and favoured child would bring his sire trouble—would make his heart ache. It seemed to me, that his strength and beauty were not so much those of Joseph, the pillar of Jacob's age, as of the Prodigal Son, who troubled his father, though he always kept his love.

"How is it that while the first-born of genius often brings honour, the second as almost often proves a source of depression and care? I could almost prophesy that your third will atone for any anxiety inflicted by this his immediate predecessor.

"There is power in that character of 'Balder,' and to me a certain horror. Did you mean it to embody, along with force, any of the special defects of the artistic character? It seems to me that those defects were never thrown out in stronger lines. I did not and could not think you meant to offer him as your cherished ideal of the true, great poet; I regarded him as a vividly-coloured picture of inflated self-esteem, almost frantic aspiration; of a nature that has made a Moloch of intellect—offered up, in pagan fires, the natural affections—sacrificed the heart to the brain. Do we not all know that true greatness is simple, self-oblivious, prone to unambitious, unselfish attachments? I am certain you feel this truth in your heart of hearts.

"But if the critics err now (as yet I have seen none of their lucubrations), you shall one day set them right in the second part of 'Balder.' You shall show them that you too know—better, perhaps, than they—that the truly great man is too sincere in his affections to grudge a sacrifice; too much absorbed in his work to talk loudly about it; too intent on finding the best way to accomplish what he undertakes to think great things of himself—the instrument. And if God places seeming impediments in his way—if his

duties sometimes seem to hamper his powers—he feels keenly, perhaps writhes, under the slow torture of hindrance and delay; but if there be a true man's heart in his breast, he can bear, submit, wait patiently.

"Whoever speaks to me of 'Balder'—though I live too retired a life to come often in the way of comment—shall be answered according to your suggestion and my own impression. Equity demands that you should be your own interpreter. Goodbye for the present, and believe me,

"Faithfully and gratefully,

"CHARLOTTE BRONTË.

"Sydney Dobell, Esq."

A letter to her Brussels schoolfellow gives an idea of the external course of things during this winter.

"March 8th.

"I was very glad to see your handwriting again. It is, I believe, a year since I heard from you. Again and again you have recurred to my thoughts lately, and I was beginning to have some sad presages as to the cause of your silence. Your letter happily does away with all these; it brings, on the whole, glad tidings both of your papa, mama, your sisters, and last, but not least, your dear respected English self.

"My dear father has borne the severe winter very well, a circumstance for which I feel the more thankful as he had many weeks of very precarious health last summer, following an attack from which he suffered in June, and which for a few hours deprived him totally of sight, though neither his mind, speech, nor even his powers of motion were in the least affected. I can hardly tell you how thankful I was, when, after that dreary and almost despairing interval of utter darkness, some gleam of daylight became visible to him once more. I had feared that paralysis had seized the optic nerve. A sort of mist remained for a long time; and, indeed, his vision is not yet

perfectly clear, but he can read, write, and walk about, and he preaches twice every Sunday, the curate only reading the prayers. You can well understand how earnestly I wish and pray that sight may be spared him to the end; he so dreads the privation of blindness. His mind is just as strong and active as ever, and politics interest him as they do your papa. The Czar, the war, the alliance between France and England—into all these things he throws himself heart and soul; they seem to carry him back to his comparatively young days, and to renew the excitement of the last great European struggle. Of course my father's sympathies (and mine too) are all with Justice and Europe, against Tyranny and Russia.[6]

"Circumstanced as I have been, you will comprehend that I have had neither the leisure nor the inclination to go from home much during the past year. I spent a week with Mrs. Gaskell in the spring, and a fortnight with some other friends more recently, and that includes the whole of my visiting since I saw you last. My life is, indeed, very uniform and retired—more so than is quite healthful either for mind or body; yet I find reason for often-renewed feelings of gratitude, in the sort of support which still comes and cheers me on from time to time. My health, though not unbroken, is, I sometimes fancy, rather stronger on the whole than it was three years ago: headache and dyspepsia are my worst ailments. Whether I shall come up to town this season for a few days I do not yet know; but if I do, I shall hope to call in P Place."

In April she communicated the fact of her engagement to Miss Wooler.

"Haworth, April 12th.

"My dear Miss Wooler,—The truly kind interest which you have always taken in my affairs makes me feel that it is due to you to transmit an early communication on a subject respecting which I have already consulted you more than once. I must tell you then that, since I wrote last, papa's mind has gradually come round to a view very different to that which he once took; and that after some correspondence, and as the result of a visit Mr. Nicholls

paid here about a week ago, it was agreed that he was to resume the curacy of Haworth, as soon as papa's present assistant is provided with a situation, and in due course of time he is to be received as an inmate into this house.

"It gives me unspeakable content to see that now my father has once admitted this new view of the case, he dwells on it very complacently. In all arrangements, his convenience and seclusion will be scrupulously respected. Mr. Nicholls seems deeply to feel the wish to comfort and sustain his declining years. I think from Mr. Nicholls' character I may depend on this not being a mere transitory impulsive feeling, but rather that it will be accepted steadily as a duty, and discharged tenderly as an office of affection. The destiny which Providence in His goodness and wisdom seems to offer me will not, I am aware, be generally regarded as brilliant, but I trust I see in it some germs of real happiness. I trust the demands of both feeling and duty will be in some measure reconciled by the step in contemplation. It is Mr. Nicholls' wish that the marriage should take place this summer; he urges the month of July, but that seems very soon.

"When you write to me, tell me how you are ... I have now decidedly declined the visit to London; the ensuing three months will bring me abundance of occupation; I could not afford to throw away a month . . . Papa has just got a letter from the good and dear bishop, which has touched and pleased us much; it expresses so cordial an approbation of Mr. Nicholls' return to Haworth (respecting which he was consulted), and such kind gratification at the domestic arrangements which are to ensue. It seems his penetration discovered the state of things when he was here in June 1853."

She expressed herself in other letters, as thankful to One who had guided her through much difficulty, and much distress and perplexity of mind; and yet she felt what most thoughtful women do, who marry when the first flush of careless youth is over, that there was a strange, half-sad feeling in making announcements of an engagement—for cares and fears came mingled inextricably with hopes. One great relief to her mind at this time was derived from the conviction that her father took a positive pleasure in all the thoughts about and preparations for her wedding. He was anxious

that things should be expedited, and was much interested in every preliminary arrangement for the reception of Mr. Nicholls into the Parsonage as his daughter's husband. This step was rendered necessary by Mr. Brontë's great age and failing sight, which made it a paramount obligation on so dutiful a daughter as Charlotte, to devote as much time and assistance as ever in attending to his wants. Mr. Nicholls, too, hoped that he might be able to add some comfort and pleasure by his ready presence, on any occasion when the old clergyman might need his services.

At the beginning of May, Miss Brontë left home to pay three visits before her marriage. The first was to us. She only remained three days, as she had to go to the neighbourhood of Leeds, there to make such purchases as were required for her marriage. Her preparations, as she said, could neither be expensive nor extensive; consisting chiefly in a modest replenishing of her wardrobe, some re-papering and re-painting in the Parsonage; and, above all, converting the small flagged passage-room, hitherto used only for stores (which was behind her sitting-room), into a study for her husband. On this idea, and plans for his comfort, as well as her father's, her mind dwelt a good deal; and we talked them over with the same unwearying happiness which, I suppose, all women feel in such discussions—especially when money considerations call for that kind of contrivance which Charles Lamb speaks of in his "Essay on Old China," as forming so great an addition to the pleasure of obtaining a thing at last.

"Haworth, May 22nd.

"Since I came home I have been very busy stitching: the little new room is got into order, and the green and white curtains are up; they exactly suit the papering, and look neat and clean enough. I had a letter a day or two since, announcing that Mr. Nicholls comes to-morrow. I feel anxious about him; more anxious on one point than I dare quite express to myself. It seems he has again been suffering sharply from his rheumatic affection. I hear this not from himself, but from another quarter. He was ill while I was in Manchester and B—. He uttered no complaint to me; dropped no hint on the subject. Alas! he was hoping he had got the better of it, and I know how

this contradiction of his hopes will sadden him. For unselfish reasons he did so earnestly wish this complaint might not become chronic. I fear—I fear; but if he is doomed to suffer, so much the more will he need care and help. Well! come what may, God help and strengthen both him and me! I look forward to to-morrow with a mixture of impatience and anxiety."

Mr. Brontë had a slight illness which alarmed her much. Besides, all the weight of care involved in the household preparations pressed on the bride in this case—not unpleasantly, only to the full occupation of her time. She was too busy to unpack her wedding dresses for several days after they arrived from Halifax; yet not too busy to think of arrangements by which Miss Wooler's journey to be present at the marriage could be facilitated.

"I write to Miss Wooler to-day. Would it not be better, dear, if you and she could arrange to come to Haworth on the same day, arrive at Keighley by the same train; then I could order the cab to meet you at the station, and bring you on with your luggage? In this hot weather walking would be quite out of the question, either for you or for her; and I know she would persist in doing it if left to herself, and arrive half killed. I thought it better to mention this arrangement to you first, and then, if you liked it, you could settle the time, &c. with Miss Wooler, and let me know. Be sure and give me timely information, that I may write to the Devonshire Arms about the cab.

"Mr. Nicholls is a kind, considerate fellow. With all his masculine faults, he enters into my wishes about having the thing done quietly, in a way that makes me grateful; and if nobody interferes and spoils his arrangements, he will manage it so that not a soul in Haworth shall be aware of the day. He is so thoughtful, too, about 'the ladies,'—that is, you and Miss Wooler. Anticipating, too, the very arrangements I was going to propose to him about providing for your departure, &c. He and Mr. S—come to—the evening before; write me a note to let me know they are there; precisely at eight in the morning they will be in the church, and there we are to meet them. Mr. and Mrs. Grant are asked to the breakfast, not to the ceremony."

It was fixed that the marriage was to take place on the 29th of June. Her two friends arrived at Haworth Parsonage the day before; and the long summer afternoon and evening were spent by Charlotte in thoughtful arrangements for the morrow, and for her father's comfort during her absence from home. When all was finished—the trunk packed, the morning's breakfast arranged, the wedding-dress laid out,—just at bedtime, Mr. Brontë announced his intention of stopping at home while the others went to church. What was to be done? Who was to give the bride away? There were only to be the officiating clergyman, the bride and bridegroom, the bridesmaid, and Miss Wooler present. The Prayer-book was referred to; and there it was seen that the Rubric enjoins that the Minister shall receive "the woman from her father's or friend's hands," and that nothing is specified as to the sex of the "friend." So Miss Wooler, ever kind in emergency, volunteered to give her old pupil away.

The news of the wedding had slipt abroad before the little party came out of church, and many old and humble friends were there, seeing her look "like a snow-drop," as they say. Her dress was white embroidered muslin, with a lace mantle, and white bonnet trimmed with green leaves, which perhaps might suggest the resemblance to the pale wintry flower.

Mr. Nicholls and she went to visit his friends and relations in Ireland; and made a tour by Killarney, Glengariff, Tarbert, Tralee, and Cork, seeing scenery, of which she says, "some parts exceeded all I had ever imagined." .... "I must say I like my new relations. My dear husband, too, appears in a new light in his own country. More than once I have had deep pleasure in hearing his praises on all sides. Some of the old servants and followers of the family tell me I am a most fortunate person; for that I have got one of the best gentlemen in the country.... I trust I feel thankful to God for having enabled me to make what seems a right choice; and I pray to be enabled to repay as I ought the affectionate devotion of a truthful, honourable man."

Henceforward the sacred doors of home are closed upon her married life. We, her loving friends, standing outside, caught occasional glimpses of brightness, and pleasant peaceful murmurs of sound, telling of the gladness

within; and we looked at each other, and gently said, “After a hard and long struggle—after many cares and many bitter sorrows—she is tasting happiness now!” We thought of the slight astringencies of her character, and how they would turn to full ripe sweetness in that calm sunshine of domestic peace. We remembered her trials, and were glad in the idea that God had seen fit to wipe away the tears from her eyes. Those who saw her, saw an outward change in her look, telling of inward things.[cn] And we thought, and we hoped, and we prophesied, in our great love and reverence.

But God’s ways are not as our ways!

Hear some of the low murmurs of happiness we, who listened, heard:—

“I really seem to have had scarcely a spare moment since that dim quiet June morning, when you, E—, and myself all walked down to Haworth Church. Not that I have been wearied or oppressed; but the fact is, my time is not my own now; somebody else wants a good portion of it, and says, ‘we must do so and so.’ We do so and so, accordingly; and it generally seems the right thing..... We have had many callers from a distance, and latterly some little occupation in the way of preparing for a small village entertainment. Both Mr. Nicholls and myself wished much to make some response for the hearty welcome and general goodwill shown by the parishioners on his return; accordingly, the Sunday and day scholars and teachers, the church-ringers, singers, &c., to the number of five hundred, were asked to tea and supper in the School-room. They seemed to enjoy it much, and it was very pleasant to see their happiness. One of the villagers, in proposing my husband’s health, described him as a ‘consistent Christian and a kind gendanan’ I own the words touched me deeply, and I thought (as I know you would have thought had you been present) that to merit and win such a character was better than to earn either wealth, or fame, or power. I am disposed to echo that high but simple eulogium. . . . . My dear father was not well when we returned from Ireland. I am, however, most thankful to say that he is better now. May God preserve him to us yet for some years! The wish for his continued life, together with a certain solicitude for his happiness and health, seems, I scarcely know why, even stronger in me now than before I was married. Papa has taken no duty since we returned; and

each time I see Mr. Nicholls put on gown or surplice, I feel comforted to think that this marriage has secured papa good aid in his old age."

"September 19th.

"Yes! I am thankful to say my husband is in improved health and spirits. It makes me content and grateful to hear him from time to time avow his happiness in the brief, plain phrase of sincerity. My own life is more occupied than it used to be: I have not so much time for thinking: I am obliged to be more practical, for my dear Arthur is a very practical, as well as a very punctual and methodical man. Every morning he is in the National School by nine o'clock; he gives the children religious instruction till half-past ten. Almost every afternoon he pays visits amongst the poor parishioners. Of course, he often finds a little work for his wife to do, and I hope she is not sorry to help him. I believe it is not bad for me that his bent should be so wholly towards matters of life and active usefulness; so little inclined to the literary and contemplative. As to his continued affection and kind attentions, it does not become me to say much of them; but they neither change nor diminish."

Her friend and bridesmaid came to pay them a visit in October. I was to have gone also, but I allowed some little obstacle to intervene, to my lasting regret.

"I say nothing about the war; but when I read of its horrors, I cannot help thinking that it is one of the greatest curses that ever fell upon mankind. I trust it may not last long, for it really seems to me that no glory to be gained can compensate for the sufferings which must be endured. This may seem a little ignoble and unpatriotic; but I think that as we advance towards middle age, nobleness and patriotism have a different signification to us to that which we accept while young.

"You kindly inquire after Papa. He is better, and seems to gain strength as the weather gets colder; indeed, of late years his health has always been better in winter than in summer. We are all indeed pretty well; and, for my

own part, it is long since I have known such comparative immunity from headache, &c., as during the last three months. My life is different from what it used to be. May God make me thankful for it! I have a good, kind, attached husband; and every day my own attachment to him grows stronger."

Late in the autumn, Sir James Kay Shuttleworth crossed the border-hills that separate Lancashire from Yorkshire, and spent two or three days with them.

About this time, Mr. Nicholls was offered a living of much greater value than his curacy at Haworth, and in many ways the proposal was a very advantageous one; but he felt himself bound to Haworth as long as Mr. Brontë lived. Still, this offer gave his wife great and true pleasure, as a proof of the respect in which her husband was held.

"Nov. 29.

"I intended to have written a line yesterday, but just as I was sitting down for the purpose, Arthur called to me to take a walk. We set off, not intending to go far; but, though wild and cloudy, it was fair in the morning; when we had got about half a mile on the moors, Arthur suggested the idea of the waterfall; after the melted snow, he said, it would be fine. I had often wished to see it in its winter power,—so we walked on. It was fine indeed; a perfect torrent racing over the rocks, white and beautiful! It began to rain while we were watching it, and we returned home under a streaming sky. However, I enjoyed the walk inexpressibly, and would not have missed the spectacle on any account."

She did not achieve this walk of seven or eight miles, in such weather, with impunity. She began to shiver soon after her return home, in spite of every precaution, and had a bad lingering sorethroat and cold, which hung about her, and made her thin and weak.

“Did I tell you that our poor little Flossy is dead?[co] She drooped for a single day, and died quietly in the night without pain. The loss even of a dog was very saddening; yet, perhaps, no dog ever had a happier life, or an easier death.”

On Christmas-day she and her husband walked to the poor old woman (whose calf she had been set to seek in former and less happy days), carrying with them a great spice-cake to make glad her heart. On Christmas-day many a humble meal in Haworth was made more plentiful by her gifts.

Early in the new year (1855), Mr. and Mrs. Nicholls went to visit Sir James Kay Shuttleworth at Gawthorpe. They only remained two or three days, but it so fell out that she increased her lingering cold, by a long walk over damp ground in thin shoes.

Soon after her return, she was attacked by new sensations of perpetual nausea, and ever-recurring faintness. After this state of things had lasted for some time, she yielded to Mr. Nicholl’s wish that a doctor should be sent for. He came, and assigned a natural cause for her miserable indisposition;[7] a little patience, and all would go right. She who was ever patient in illness, tried hard to bear up and bear on. But the dreadful sickness increased and increased, till the very sight of food occasioned nausea. “A wren would have starved on what she ate during those last six weeks,” says one. Tabby’s health had suddenly and utterly given way, and she died in this time of distress and anxiety respecting the last daughter of the house she had served long. Martha tenderly waited on her mistress, and from time to time tried to cheer her with the thought of the baby that was coming. “I dare say I shall be glad sometime,” she would say; “but I am so ill—so weary—” Then she took to her bed, too weak to sit up. From that last couch she wrote two notes—in pencil. The first, which has no date, is addressed to her own “Dear Nell.”

“I must write one line out of my dreary bed. The news of M——’s probable recovery came like a ray of joy to me. I am not going to talk of my sufferings—it would be useless and painful. I want to give you an assurance, which I know will comfort you—and that is, that I find in my husband the tenderest nurse, the kindest support, the best earthly comfort that ever woman had. His patience never fails, and it is tried by sad days and broken nights. Write and tell me about Mrs.—’s case; how long was she ill, and in what way? Papa—thank God!—is better. Our poor old Tabby is dead and buried. Give my kind love to Miss Wooler. May God comfort and help you.

“C. B. NICHOLLS.”

The other—also in faint, faint pencil marks—was to her Brussels schoolfellow.

“Feb. 15th.

“A few lines of acknowledgment your letter shall have, whether well or ill. At present I am confined to my bed with illness, and have been so for three weeks. Up to this period, since my marriage, I have had excellent health. My husband and I live at home with my father; of course, I could not leave him. He is pretty well, better than last summer. No kinder, better husband than mine, it seems to me, there can be in the world. I do not want now for kind companionship in health and the tenderest nursing in sickness. Deeply I sympathise in all you tell me about Dr.W and your excellent mother’s anxiety. I trust he will not risk another operation. I cannot write more now; for I am much reduced and very weak. God bless you all.—Yours affectionately,

“C. B. NICHOLLS.”

I do not think she ever wrote a line again. Long days and longer nights went by; still the same relentless nausea and faintness, and still borne on in

patient trust. About the third week in March there was a change; a low wandering delirium came on; and in it she begged constantly for food and even for stimulants. She swallowed eagerly now; but it was too late. Wakening for an instant from this stupor of intelligence, she saw her husband’s woe-worn face, and caught the sound of some murmured words of prayer that God would spare her. “Oh!” she whispered forth, “I am not going to die, am I? He will not separate us, we have been so happy.”

Early on Saturday morning, March 31st, the solemn tolling of Haworth church-bell spoke forth the fact of her death to the villagers who had known her from a child, and whose hearts shivered within them as they thought of the two sitting desolate and alone in the old grey house.

CHAPTER XIV.

I have always been much struck with a passage in Mr. Forster’s Life of Goldsmith.[cp] Speaking of the scene after his death, the writer says:—

“The staircase of Brick Court is said to have been filled with mourners, the reverse of domestic; women without a home, without domesticity of any kind, with no friend but him they had come to weep for; outcasts of that great, solitary, wicked city, to whom he had never forgotten to be kind and charitable.”

This came into my mind when I heard of some of the circumstances attendant on Charlotte’s funeral.

Few beyond that circle of hills knew that she, whom the nations praised far off, lay dead that Easter morning. Of kith and kin she had more in the grave to which she was soon to be borne, than among the living. The two mourners, stunned with their great grief, desired not the sympathy of strangers. One member out of most of the families in the parish was bidden to the funeral; and it became an act of self-denial in many a poor household to give up to another the privilege of paying their last homage to her; and those who were excluded from the formal train of mourners thronged the churchyard and church, to see carried forth, and laid beside her own people, her whom, not many months ago, they had looked at as a pale white bride, entering on a new life with trembling happy hope.

Among those humble friends who passionately grieved over the dead, was a village girl who had been seduced some little time before, but who had found a holy sister in Charlotte. She had sheltered her with her help, her counsel, her strengthening words; had ministered to her needs in her time of trial. Bitter, bitter was the grief of this poor young woman, when she heard that her friend was sick unto death, and deep is her mourning until this day. A blind girl, living some four miles from Haworth, loved Mrs. Nicholls so dearly that, with many cries and entreaties, she implored those about her to lead her along the roads, and over the moor-paths, that she might hear the last solemn words, “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and

certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Such were the mourners over Charlotte Brontë's grave.

I have little more to say. If my readers find that I have not said enough, I have said too much. I cannot measure or judge of such a character as hers. I cannot map out vices, and virtues, and debateable land. One who knew her long and well,—the "Mary" of this Life—writes thus of her dead friend:—

"She thought much of her duty, and had loftier and clearer notions of it than most people, and held fast to them with more success. It was done, it seems to me, with much more difficulty than people have of stronger nerves, and better fortunes. All her life was but labour and pain; and she never threw down the burden for the sake of present pleasure. I don't know what use you can make of all I have said. I have written it with the strong desire to obtain appreciation for her. Yet, what does it matter? She herself appealed to the world's judgment for her use of some of the faculties she had,—not the best,—but still the only ones she could turn to strangers' benefit. They heartily, greedily enjoyed the fruits of her labours, and then found out she was much to be blamed for possessing such faculties. Why ask for a judgment on her from such a world?"

But I turn from the critical, unsympathetic public,—inclined to judge harshly because they have only seen superficially and not thought deeply. I appeal to that larger and more solemn public, who know how to look with tender humility at faults and errors; how to admire generously extraordinary genius, and how to reverence with warm, full hearts all noble virtue. To that Public I commit the memory of Charlotte Brontë.

THE END.

ENDNOTES

Volume I

CHAPTER I

1 (p. 14) A.D. sexcentissimo: This inscription suggests that a monastic community was established in Haworth in 600. Were this accurate, the community would have predated the arrival of Christianity in the region in the generally accepted year of 627, when the Roman missionary Paulinus, later archbishop of York, converted the Anglo-Saxon King Edwin of Northumbria.

2 (p. 15) *curate at Haworth:* Thomas Dunham Whitaker (1759-1821), vicar of Blackburn and local antiquarian, casts doubt on the antiquity of the Haworth chapel by suggesting that a stone mason mis-read the original inscription. This debate is important to Gaskell because it allows her to establish the independent character of the locals and to explain the grounds for their unusual right of refusal of curates.

CHAPTER II

1 (p. 20) *religious dictations of such men as* Laud: William Laud (1573-1645), archbishop of Canterbury under Charles I, tried to impose a uniform standard of worship throughout England in an effort to deter religious dissent. Dissenters were members of sects that worshiped outside of the Church of England. These sects were historically well established in the northern manufacturing districts, Yorkshire among them. Gaskell, a Unitarian, was herself a dissenter.

2 (p. 20) *Commonwealth men:* Gaskell turns social historian and explains the religious and economic forces that induced Yorkshire to support the Commonwealth government of Oliver Cromwell, which deposed and executed Charles I in 1649, and set about overturning the religious and trading restrictions the Stuarts had imposed.

3 (p. 21) *persecuting days of Charles* II: Upon his restoration to the throne in 1660, Charles II attempted to rein in religious dissent with the Act of Uniformity (1662), which required all clergy to take an oath that they would adhere to Anglican doctrine as established in The *Book of Common Prayer.*

4 (p. 21) “Life of Oliver Heywood”: Joseph Hunter wrote *The Rise of the Old Dissent, Exemplified in the Life of Oliver Heywood, One of the Founders of the Presbyterian* Congregations in the County of York (1842).

5 (p. 26) *scene of the ministrations of the* Rev. William *Grimshaw:* The Reverend William Grimshaw (1708-1763), perpetual curate of Haworth from 1742 until his death and a major Evangelical figure, is credited with revitalizing the spiritual life of the town by introducing the Evangelical Revival. The Evangelical party comprised reform-minded clergy within the Church of England who believed in a religion based on personal revelation and social responsibility.

6 (p. 26) *Newton,* Cowper’s *friend:* John Newton (1725-1807), a slave-ship captain who underwent a conversion and became an Evangelical clergyman, wrote Memoirs of the Life of the *LateWilliam Grimshaw* (1825). Newton and the poet William Cowper (1731-1800) collaborated on the Olney

Hymns (1779). Cowper, a proto-Romantic, is best known for the expressive style of his poetry and its theme of religious doubt.

7 (p. 27) fervour of a Wesley... *fanaticism of a Whitefield:* John Wesley (1703-1791) and George Whitefield (1714-1770) led Methodism, a religious movement that valued personal spiritualism over ritualistic devotion, from within the Anglican Church. Methodists adopted open-air preaching in order to reach marginalized members of the community. Doctrinal differences ultimately led to the severing of the relationship between Whitefield, a strict Calvinist who believed in predestination, and Wesley, a follower of Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius, who maintained that individuals could effect their own salvation. Methodism's formal break with the established church occurred in 1795.

8 (p. 30) Dr. Scoresby: William Scoresby (1789-1857) was an Arctic explorer before he entered the Anglican ministry and later became the vicar of Bradford (1839-1847); he was a source of local history and local color for Gaskell.

9 (p. 32) *circumstances which I have described:* Samuel Redhead's son-in-law disputed Gaskell's version of events. Gaskell responded in the third edition by appending testimony from two eyewitnesses supporting her account.

CHAPTER III

1 (p. 34) Patrick Brontë... County Down in Ireland: For Patrick Brontë's biography, see John Lock and W T. Dixon, *A Man of Sorrow: The Life,* Letters *and Times of the Rev. Patrick* Brontë, 1777-1861 (London: Nelson, 1965), and Barker, *The* Brontës; see "For Further Reading."

2 (p. 35) *military duties which they had to perform:* During the period 1803-1805 Napoleon was gathering forces at Boulogne with the intention of invading England, a threat that ended with Nelson's victory off Cape Trafalgar, Spain. One of Patrick Brontë's Cambridge classmates, Lord Palmerston (1784—1865), later became prime minister (1855-1858, 1859-1865).

3 (p. 39) of Mr. Brontë's *composing:* Patrick Brontë was a published author at the time of his marriage. He had published two collections of moral poems, *Cottage Poems* (1811) and the *Rural Minstrel* (1813), as well as the didactic romances *Cottage in the Wood* (1815) and The *Maid of* Killarney (1818). He also weighed in on religious and social issues of the day by contributing to regional newspapers throughout his career.

4 (p. 39) *"Advice to* a Lady": George, Baron Lyttelton's *Advice to* a *Lady* (1733) was typical of eighteenth-century conduct literature for girls. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) summarized and lampooned it: "Be plain in Dress and sober in your Diet; / In short my Dearee, kiss me, and be quiet."

5 (p. 43) *"potatoes for their dinner":* The false claim that Patrick Brontë enforced a vegetarian diet and the charge of wastefulness, to which servants Nancy and Sarah Garrs objected, were retracted in the third edition. Gaskell wanted only to show that "no *stingy* motive" induced Patrick to deny his children meat *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 368). This and much other disputed information about life at the parsonage came from the nurse who attended Mrs. Brontë in her final illness.

6 (p. 44) *the ideas of Rousseau and Mr. Day:* Political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was also an educational theorist. In Émile (1762) he advocated educating boys to exercise the independence accorded

them by nature rather than making them conform to their social station; girls, however, were to be molded with the exclusive purpose of pleasing their future partners. Rousseau influenced Thomas Day (1748-1789), whose *History of Sandford and Merton* (1783-1789) was one of the first novels written for children.

7 (p. 45) *reduced to the condition of stools:* The catalogue of Patrick's "volcanic wrath," which included burning his children's boots, shredding his wife's silk dresses, burning a hearthrug, and sawing the backs off chairs was omitted, at Patrick's request, in the third edition.

8 (p. 45) *days of the Luddites:* The Luddite riots (1811-1816) were staged by organized gangs of cloth workers who roamed the manufacturing districts destroying the machinery they felt was displacing them from their jobs. Brontë would set Shirley (1849) amid this uprising.

CHAPTER IV

1 (p. 53) *William Carus Wilson:* The Rev. William Carus Wilson (1791-1859), a Calvinist Evangelical who was the model for *Jane* Eyre's Reverend Brocklehurst, established the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge. Like his fictional counterpart, Carus Wilson wrote devotional tracts full of fire and brimstone for children. He was a polarizing figure. A vitriolic public debate erupted with the publication of the Life about the degree of culpability he had, if any, in his management of Cowan Bridge (see Wise and Symington, eds., *The* Brontës: Their *Lives, Friendships, and Correspondence,* vol. 4, appendix 1).

2 (p. 53) *certain sum was raised annually in subscription:* Subscribers to the school included such prominent Evangelicals as moralist Hannah More and abolitionist William Wilberforce.

3 (p. 59) *Miss Temple, the superintendent:* Miss Ann Evans (1792-1856) was superintendent of the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge. Evans died before the publication of the Life, but her husband and a Miss Andrews, who was the model for Miss Scatcherd in *Jane Eyre* (1847), came to the defense of William Carus Wilson, who ran the school (see note 1, above).

4 (p. 59) *after Maria's and Elizabeth's deaths:* Charlotte and Emily in fact did not return to the school after their sisters' deaths. According to school records, they withdrew on June 1, 1825.

CHAPTER V

1 (p. 64) *Tabby:* Tabitha Aykroyd (the name had various spellings) served the Brontës from her mid-fifties until her death in 1855. For Gaskell, and perhaps for Brontë as well, she embodied England's folkloric past and Yorkshire superstition. Bessie in *Jane Eyre* and Martha in Shirley share some of Tabby's qualities. Aykroyd was a Methodist and a class leader at her chapel.

2 (p. 69) *"We then chose who should be chief men in our islands":* The Brontë children's choice of heroes evidences their Toryism and the degree to which the periodicals their father received informed their worldview. Branwell selects the fictional John Bull, Englishness personified, and the poet Leigh Hunt (1784-1859). Emily chooses literary men: novelist Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), and John Gibson Lockhart (1794—1854), contributor to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and later editor of the *Quarterly Review.* Charlotte picks the Duke of Wellington (see note 3, below), and Christopher North, the fictional persona adopted by John Wilson, editor of *Blackwood's.* Anne chooses Lord William Bentinck, the governor-general of Bengal who abolished suttee (self-cremation of a Hindu widow on the funeral pyre of her husband as a mark of her devotion to him). With the exception of Emily, they each choose an eminent physician as well.

3 (p. 69) "Wellington *and two sons":* Charlotte's lifelong hero was Arthur Wellesley (1769-1852), the Irish-born career soldier and Tory politician who was made duke of Wellington for his victories over Napoleon, which included the decisive Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Wellington later served as prime minister (1828-1830). The Marquis of Douro and Lord Charles Wellesley (Brontë's favored persona in her younger years) were Wellington's two sons.

4 (p. 70) *Blackwood's Magazine:* The *Leeds Intelligencer* (founded 1754) and the *Leeds* Mercury (founded 1718) were regional newspapers. The character John Bull appeared in a series of satirical Tory pamphlets (1712). *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (founded 1817) was a monthly magazine with a Tory bent that covered literary and political issues.

5 (p. 71) “*Friendship’s Offering* for 1829”: The reference is to an annual miscellany of poetry, prose, and engravings published by Smith, Elder and Company, later to be Brontë’s publisher.

6 (p. 72) ”*the great Catholic* question”: The Catholic Emancipation Act (1829), the culmination of a series of laws passed beginning in the eighteenth century, lifted most civil restrictions imposed on Catholics and allowed them to stand for Parliament.

CHAPTER VI

1 (p. 78) *Miss* Woolers, *who lived at Roe Head*: The four Wooler sisters ran the school Charlotte Brontë and her sisters attended at Roe Head. Charlotte was subsequently employed as a teacher there. The school relocated to Dewsbury Moor in 1837. Margaret Wooler became a lasting friend of Charlotte's.

2 (p. 81) E.'s *home was five miles away:* Ellen Nussey (1817-1897), Brontë's closest friend, lived at Brookroyd House, Birstall, Yorkshire. Some suggest that the Brontë—Nussey correspondence, which forms the basis for much of the *Life,* results in a one-dimensional portrait of Brontë, who notably did not discuss her literary affairs with Nussey. See the Introduction for a more detailed account of their relationship.

3 (p. 81) *(The Rose and Jessie Yorke of "Shirley"):* Mary (1817-1893) and Martha (1819-1842) Taylor. The Taylors lived in Gomersal and later at Hunsworth, both in Yorkshire. Brontë met them at Roe Head; they later attended school at the same time in Brussels, where Martha died. Mary was independent and outspoken, and she championed women's rights. Dismayed by the employment opportunities available to women in England, Mary emigrated to New Zealand in 1845. She destroyed all of Brontë's letters but the one describing her first visit to the offices of Smith, Elder and Company.

4 (p. 83) *"She knew the names of the two* ministries... *the Reform Bill":* The Reform Bill of 1832 extended enfranchisement by lowering property qualifications for voters and redistributing parliamentary seats from rural areas (known as "rotten" or "pocket" boroughs) controlled by the gentry, to heavily populated urban areas that had previously been underrepresented.

5 (p. 84) 'Frazer's *Magazine':* A Tory periodical founded in 1830, Fraser's *Magazine* was a rival to Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine.*

6 (p. 88) *burning of* Cartwright's Mill: In April 1812 more than one hundred Luddites attacked William Cartwright's mill in Huddersfield, not far from Haworth. Cartwright defended his property with the aid of a few soldiers. Two Luddites were killed. Several weeks later the Luddites

murdered local mill owner William Horsfall. Brontë dramatized this incident in Shirley.

7 (p. 89) *Mr. Roberson, of Heald's Hall:* Reverend Hammond Roberson (1757-1841) functions almost as a foil for Patrick Brontë, who, though a Tory, was far more tolerant and less doctrinaire in his allegiances than Roberson was. Although Brontë supported the mill owners in the conflict with the Luddites, in other disputes he supported the workers.

CHAPTER VII

1 (pp. 96-97) “J‘arrivait *d* Haworth... elles auront *ce plaisir”:* “I arrived at Haworth in perfect safety without the slightest accident or misfortune. My little sisters ran out of the house to meet me as soon as the carriage could be seen, and they embraced me with as much eagerness and pleasure as if I had been away for more than a year. My Papa, my aunt, and the gentleman of whom my brother had spoken, were all assembled in the parlor, and in a little while I went in as well. It is often Heaven’s order that when one loses a pleasure there is another ready to take its place. Just so, I had to leave very dear friends, but I returned to a family as dear and beloved. Likewise, as you were losing me (dare I believe that my departure caused you pain?) you awaited the arrival of your brother and sister. I gave my sisters the apples you kindly sent them; they said that they are certain Miss E. is very amiable and good; all are extremely impatient to see you; I hope that in very few months time they will have that pleasure” (translated by Anne Taranto) .

2 (p. 97) *Wordsworth’s and* Southey’s *poems:* Robert Southey (1774-1843) was poet laureate from 1813 until his death. William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was considered the founder, along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), of the Romantic movement in poetry; Wordsworth became poet laureate upon Southey’s death.

3 (pp 97-98) *“mad Methodist Magazines”: The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine (founded 1778) and The Lady’s Magazine, or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex* (1770-1848) were publications Mrs. Brontë brought with her from Cornwall when she married. Gaskell includes these examples to show the imaginative legacy Brontë received from her mother.

4 (p. 100) *“British Essayists”* ... ”The *Lounger”: British Essayists* (1807-1808) was a compilation by the biographer and prolific editor Alexander Chalmers. Essays of Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) appeared in the periodical *The Rambler* (1750-1752). Henry Mackenzie (1745-1831) was editor and chief contributor to the Scottish periodicals The *Mirrour* (1779-1780) and *The Lounger* (1785-1787).

5 (p. 103) *"read the rest fearlessly":* Brontë's course of reading for Nussey contains some books that were thought inappropriate for young women, such as Lord Byron's Cain (1821) and Don Juan (1819-1824), and Shakespeare's bawdier comedies. This list is a testimony to Patrick Brontë's liberal attitude toward his daughter's education, whether from benign neglect, as Gaskell posits, or other motives.

CHAPTER VIII

1 (p. 109) *in her place* at *Miss Wooler's:* The quoted paragraph that follows is taken from Brontë prefatory remarks to the selection of her sisters' poetry appended to the second edition of Wuthering *Heights and* Agnes *Grey* (1850).

2 (p. 110) *duties of the day... tedious and monotonous:* Brontë's fragmentary" Roe Head Journal," which Gaskell does not quote from, is more expressive than are her letters to Nussey about her frustration with her current employment and her consequent depression. Brontë registers her anger at being interrupted by a student in a moment of inspiration: "I felt as if I could have written gloriously.... But just then a Dolt came up with a lesson. I thought I should have vomited" (Barker, ed. The Brontës: A Life in Letters, p. 39).

3 (p. 110) an *event* happened... *good deal of interest:* This anecdote detailing the supposed genesis of Jane Eyre is omitted in the third edition.

4 (p. 112) *any other poet:* In the third edition Gaskell adds Mary Taylor's comment that Cowper's popular poem "The Castaway" was a favorite in the Brontë household. Gaskell's insistence on the affinity between Brontë and Cowper stems from her desire to find an analogue for Brontë in the mainstream Christian poet who struggled with depression and religious doubt. Brontë does not include Cowper among the "first-rate" poets in the reading list she prepares for Ellen Nussey (see note 4 to volume I, chapter VII).

5 (p. 112) "*they fly from my lips* as *if I were Tantalus:"* Tantalus is the Greek mythological figure punished with eternal thirst and hunger for transgressing against the gods; he is thus an emblem of thwarted desire.

6 (p. 117) *Coleridge:* Hartley Coleridge (1796-1849), a minor poet and critic, was the son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (endnote 1 to volume I, chapter VII).

7 (p. 117) *given by the poet to Mr.* Quillinan : Edward Quillinan was Wordsworth's son-in-law. Gaskell is mistaken about Wordsworth's estimation of Branwell's letter. In fact, according to Southey, Wordsworth

was “disgusted” by the letter’s “gross flattery” and “abuse of other poets“” and declined to answer it. Why he preserved it is unclear (Southey to Caroline Bowles, March 27, 1837; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 1, p. 171, note 1).

8 (p. 132) *some one having* a *slight* resemblance... in *holy orders:* Ellen Nussey’s brother, Henry, proposed to Brontë in the spring of 1839. He received a prompt rejection: ”I am not the serious, grave, cool-headed individual you suppose—you would think me romantic and eccentric.... I will never for the sake of... escaping the stigma of an old maid take a worthy man whom I am conscious I cannot render happy“ (Charlotte Brontë to Henry Nussey, March 5, 1839; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 1, pp. 185-186).

9 (p. 134) *“Anne’s departure”:* This refers to Anne’s leaving to be a governess to the Inghams at Blake Hall. She was dismissed within the year

10 (p. 135) *engaged as* a *governess:* Charlotte was employed by the Sidgwicks of Stonegappe, near Lothersdale, from May to July 1839. She was responsible for two children aged four and six. Charlotte complained to her sister Emily that Mrs. Sidgwick cared “nothing in the world about me except how to contrive the greatest possible quantity of labour may be squeezed out of me” (Charlotte Brontë to Emily Brontë, June 8, 1839; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 1, p. 191).

11 (p. 139) *the assistance of* a *curate:* William Weightman (1814-1842) was the curate at Haworth for three years (1839-1842). Although Weightman was an integral and beloved member of the parsonage while he served there, Gaskell suppresses almost all information about him, presumably because, in letters Gaskell omits, Charlotte Brontë and Nussey both manifest signs of infatuation with the young curate.

12 (p. 140) *his own curate:* Brontë’s second proposal of marriage came from David Pryce (sometimes Bryce; 1811-1840), curate to William Hodgson, who was formerly Patrick Brontë’s curate.

13 (p. 143) *“drop my subscription to the Jews”:* “The Jews” is shorthand for the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, founded in 1809.

CHAPTER IX

1 (p. 146) the *"Spectator":* A periodical published by Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Richard Steele (1672-1729), the *Spectator* (1711-1712) satirized the mores of its times.

2 (p. 148) *employed her leisure hours in writing* a *story:* Brontë was writing "Ashworth," an untitled and incomplete novel. See Christine Alexander, ed., *Early Writings of Charlotte* Brontë (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 204.

3 (p. 149) "*whether* his 'C.T.' meant *Charles Timms or Charlotte Tomkins*": Gaskell, anxious about the letter's irreverent tone, liberally edits out material without using ellipses, as she does elsewhere, to indicate missing text. Among the comments Gaskell censors is Brontë's taunting remark on gender anonymity: "Several young gentlemen curl their hair and wear corsets—and several young ladies are excellent whips and by no means despicable jockies," and her facetious wonder that Hartley Coleridge deigned to read her "demi-semi" novelette (Charlotte Brontë, draft letter to H. Coleridge, December 1840; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 1, p. 237).

4 (p. 151) *"Puseyite or a Hookist:"* This is a reference to the followers of Edward Bouverie Pusey and Walter Farquhar Hook, important figures of the Oxford Movement, which advocated a return to formalism in the Anglican Church.

5 (p. 155) *"Mr. and Mrs. —?"*: Mr. and Mrs. Collins are possibly the models for the abusive marriage portrayed by Anne Brontë in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848).

CHAPTER X

1 (p. 158) “Mr. and Mrs.—”: Brontë was governess to the White family, Upperwood House, from March to December 1841. She was responsible for two children, aged six and eight. Of her charges Brontë observed: “The children are not such little devils incarnate as the Sidgwicks, but they are over-indulged, and at times hard to manage” (Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, March 21, 1841; in The *Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 1, p. 248).

CHAPTER XI

1 (p. 170) pensionnat *of Madame* Héger: Claire Zöe Heger (1804-1890), later fictionalized as Mme. Beck in Villette (1853), was the director of the school Brontë and her sister Emily attended in Brussels. Her husband, Constantin Heger (1809-1896), the model for Paul Emanuel in Villette, was a rhetoric professor at the Athénée Royale, an upper school for boys. In addition to teaching at his wife's boarding school, he also conducted evening classes for factory workers.

2 (p. 171) *and straight returned to his wild Yorkshire* village: Actually, Patrick Brontë visited the battlefield at Waterloo and toured Brussels before returning home.

3 (p. 174) *whose acquaintance I* am glad *to have made:* Gaskell traveled to Brussels in May 1856 "to have a look at" the Hegers as part of her research for the biography *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 271a). During this visit M. Heger shared letters Brontë sent him after her departure from Brussels; they revealed an obsessive attachment to her former teacher that was fueled by the intellectual and imaginative connection they had forged.

4 (pp. 174—175) *""Je ne connais pas personellement M.* Héger... appreciée par ses élèves:" Gaskell includes this letter, written by an unidentified correspondent who did not know M. Heger personally, as testimony to his upright character. Gaskell was perhaps anxious to protect M. Heger's reputation in the event that Brontë's attachment to him was surmised by readers of the biography. The writer describes M. Heger as a "noble" man of "principle and conscience" who is "profoundly and openly religious," and who "makes everyone who comes into contact with him love him." The writer, who has seen Mme. Heger only once, describes her as a "cold" woman who is nevertheless beloved by her pupils.

5 (p. 179) "Mirabeau Orateur":The quotation is from Étude sur Mirabeau (1834), by Victor Hugo (1802-1885). The Comte de Mirabeau (1749-1791), a great orator, was a political moderate active in the early stages of the French Revolution.

6 (pp. 180-182) “*De temps en* temps... *de Moise et* de Josue”: Brontë’s essay celebrates the religious zeal of Peter the Hermit (c. 1050-1115), a lowly monk who led the First Crusade in 1096. “From time to time there appear on the earth men who are destined to be the instruments of great moral or political changes,” she begins. Among these great men she ranks “conquerors” like Alexander the Great and Attila, “revolutionaries” like Cromwell and Robespierre, and ”religious enthusiasts“ like Muhammad and Peter the Hermit. The essay generally extols men whose passionate natures propel them to great action and accepts the fact that they tend to have no moderation “either in good or evil.” Brontë especially admires Peter the Hermit, whom she describes as a poor, physically small, and relatively unattractive man who was able to sway nations through his eloquence, enthusiasm, and faith. Brontë assigns to Peter the Hermit the “double role of prophet and warrior,” and reveals her Western bias by remarking that “Mahomet never moved to action the indolent nations of the East as Peter moved the vigorous people of the West.”

7 (p. 183) *M.* Héger *took up* a *more advanced plan... synthetical teaching:* M. Heger’s pedagogical method focused on analyzing rhetorical strategies among authors treating the same subject, with a view to discerning political and other buried agendas. This training aided Brontë in the novelist’s task of developing character complexity and framing a point of view.

8 (p. 184) *desire to do the will of the Lord:* The authors and the works referred to are Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), the funeral oration for Henrietta Maria (1609-1669), widow of Charles I, in 1669; François Guizot (1787-1874), Histoire de la *revolution d’Angleterre* (6 vols., 1826-1856); and Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), On Heroes, *Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841).

9 (pp. 191-193) “Au Révérend Monsieur Brontë... de mes sentiments de haute *consideration”:* M. Heger’s condolence letter to Patrick Brontë includes a favorable report of his daughters’ progress at school and expresses the wish that they will soon return to finish their studies in order that they might become qualified teachers. At such time, M. Heger explains, he and his wife could offer one or both girls a post that would provide ”that sweet independence so difficult for a young person to find. This is not, understand well, Sir, this is not now a matter of personal interest for us, it is

a matter of affection; you will pardon me if we talk to you of your children, if we concern ourselves with their future, as if they were part of our family."

CHAPTER XII

1 (p. 199) “Sur La Nom de Napoleon”: The title should read, *Sur* La *Mort de Napoleon.* Brontë’s condemnation of Napoleon culminates in a paean to her childhood hero, the Duke of Wellington.

2 (pp. 199-202) “Napoléon naquit en Corse... Wellington a de droit à sa reconnoissance”: Brontë’s essay, which deplores Napoléon’s demagoguery, negates his achievements and focuses instead on his death in exile on the island of St. Helena. “Others have told and retold his exploits, as for me,” Brontë explains, “I stop to contemplate the desolation of his final hour.” Brontë asks: “Between his cradle and his grave what was there?” Her answer: “A sea of blood, a throne, then more blood, and chains.” Brontë judges Napoleon on both a political and a personal level. She condemns him for “tearing up entire nations” to build his empire, but his greatest sin in her estimation was that he was not bound by human affection: “He did not love; he considered his friends and associates merely as instruments upon which he played, while they were useful, and which he threw aside when they ceased to be so.” Brontë’s national pride is evidenced when she contrasts Napoléon’s ambition and love of flattery with the political selflessness and “modesty” of his vanquisher, the Duke of Wellington.

3 (p. 204) *There were causes for stress and* anxiety... *particularly* as *regarded Bran*well : The Brontës did not discover Branwell’s disgrace in the Robinson affair (see Introduction) until July 1845, a year and a half after the period under discussion here. Gaskell intentionally confuses the chronology of events in order to manufacture external reasons for Brontë’s depression.

4 (p. 206) *she was uncompromising truth:* Gaskell manufactures a cover story for Brontë here. Mme. Heger’s coldness was the result of Brontë’s growing attachment to M. Heger not of religious differences. Gaskell became aware of the true reason for the estrangement during her visit to Brussels, when Mme. Heger on finding she was Brontë’s friend, refused to see her. Brontë’s unease about exposing the Heger affair through *Villette* is evidenced by her decision to reserve the right of translation of the novel. Nevertheless, a pirated French edition appeared in 1855.

CHAPTER XIII

1 (p. 215) *But* a *weight hung over her*: The remainder of this paragraph and the following one were omitted in the third edition due to a threatened libel suit from Mrs. Robinson, by then Lady Scott. Gaskell's lawyers also printed a retraction in the Times (May 30, 1857). All unsold copies of the first and second editions were pulled from the shelves.

2 (p. 216) *The story must be told:* Gaskell vilifies Lydia Robinson as the seducer of innocent Branwell. Patrick Brontë approved this version of the events, but it is unclear where the truth lies, or if there was indeed a sexual liaison, as Branwell claimed. See the Introduction.

3 (p. 219) she thus writes to M. Héger: The text that follows is compiled from carefully culled extracts made by Heger for Gaskell from two of Brontë's letters (July 24 and October 24, 1844). For the full French text of the letters, see Gérin, *Charlotte* Brontë:The *Evolution* of Genius, Appendix D.

4 (p. 219) "Il *n'y* a *rien que je* craigns ... *Agréez, Monsieur,* &c.": "There is nothing I fear as much as idleness, inertia, lethargy of the faculties. When the body is lethargic, the spirit suffers cruelly; I would not know this lethargy, if I could write. I used to spend days, weeks, entire months writing, and not altogether without success, since Southey and [Hartley] Coleridge, two of our best authors, to whom I sent some manuscripts, were pleased to give their approbation; but at present, my eyesight is weak; if I write too much I will become blind. This weakness of sight is a terrible privation for me; without it, do you know what I would do, Monsieur? I would write a book and dedicate it to my literature master, to the only master I have ever had—to you, Monsieur! I have told you often in French how much I respect you, how indebted I am to your kindness and your instruction. I would like to say it one time in English. But that cannot be; there's no use thinking about it. A literary career is closed to me.... Do not forget to tell me how you are and how Madame and the children are. I hope to receive news from you soon; this idea cheers me, because the memory of your kindness will never be effaced from my mind, and as long as this

memory endures, the respect that you have inspired will endure also. Accept, Monsieur, &c.” (translated by Anne Taranto).

5 (p. 222) “Je *crains beaucoup d’oublier le* français ... *j‘y irai”* “I very much fear that I will forget my French—I learn half a page of French by heart every day, and I take great pleasure in the lesson. I want to assure Mme. of my esteem for her; I fear that Marie, Louise, and Claire will have already forgotten me; but I will see you again one day; As soon as I can earn enough money to go to Brussels I will do so“” (translated by Anne Taranto).

6 (p. 225) *never see Branwell* Brontë *again:* Mr. Robinson’s will reveals this claim to be untrue. Branwell might have floated this face-saving rumor, or, as Barker suggests, Lydia Robinson may have done so in an effort to deter Branwell’s unwanted attentions (Barker, The Brontës, pp. 493-496).

CHAPTER XIV

1 (p. 228) an *intelligent man living in Haworth:* The man is John Greenwood, the Haworth stationer. According to Gaskell, Brontë counted him her only friend in Haworth *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, letter 337).

2 (p. 231) *railway panic:* In the mid-nineteenth century several companies formed to build rail lines across England, selling shares on the stock market to raise money for their ventures. Especially notorious was George Hudson (1800—1871), the "Railway King,"" chairman of the York and North-Midland Company and a speculator who merged several companies into one conglomerate and engaged in what is now termed insider trading, to inflate holdings artificially. The bubble Hudson helped to create burst in 1847, bringing financial ruin to many investors.

3 (p. 237) her father's curate: Arthur Bell Nicholls (1818?-1906) came to Haworth as curate in May 1845. He was born in Ireland and educated at Trinity College, Dublin. Note how Gaskell frames Brontë's apparent indifference to Nicholls as modesty.

Volume II

CHAPTER I

1 (p. 246) *Mr. Trench:* Richard Chenevix Trench (1807-1886), professor of divinity, philologist, and later archbishop of Dublin, wrote On *the Study of Words* (1851) and *English, Past* and *Present* (1855).

2 (p. 247) *"the death of Currer Bell":* The anonymous obituary of Brontë by Harriet Martineau, a novelist who influenced Brontë, appeared in the *Daily News,* April 1855 (see Allot, ed., *The* Brontës:The *Critical Heritage,* pp. 301-305).

CHAPTER II

1 (p. 255) *Mr. Smith:* George Smith (1824-1901), Brontë's publisher, revitalized the business founded by his father in 1816, making Smith, Elder and Company a house of literary distinction. Smith counted Ruskin and Darwin among his authors, and the success of Jane Eyre attracted other prominent novelists, among them Thackeray and Gaskell. Smith founded the Cornhill *Magazine* (1860), the foremost literary periodical of its day, and published the first edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1885-1900).

2 (p. 259) *gentleman connected with the* firm *to read* it first: William Smith Williams (1800-1875), Smith's literary adviser, was the first to recognize the merit of *Jane Eyre.* Williams's critical acumen was central to the firm's success.

3 (p. 259) *The Reviews:* Reviews of the first edition of *Jane Eyre* mentioned here appeared in the following periodicals (in these notes and the footnotes, brackets are placed around a writer's name to indicate that the review appeared unsigned—that is, as an anonymous review): [H. F. Chorley], *Athenaeum,* October 23, 1847; *Spectator,* November 6, 1847; *Literary Gazette,* October 23, 1847; and [A.W Fonblanque], the *Examiner,* November 27, 1847. Other reviews ran in the *Economist,* November 27, 1847, and *People's Journal,* November 1847. Reviews of the second edition of Jane *Eyre* include Elizabeth Rigby's infamous, if unsigned, ad hominem attack in the *Quarterly Review* 84 (December 1848) and an unsigned notice by G. H. Lewes, in Fraser's *Magazine* (December 1847). For a selection, see Allot, ed., *The* Brontës: *The Critical Heritage.*

4 (p. 266) *one who offered presumptuous and injudicious praise:* Samuel Johnson admonished Hannah More to "consider what her flattery was worth, before she choaked him with it." (Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* [1786]). In *The Life of Samuel Johnson,* LL.D. (1791) James Boswell renders it: "Dearest madam, consider with yourself what your flattery is worth, before you bestow it so freely."

5 (p. 267) G. H. *Lewes:* The versatile and largely self-educated thinker George Henry Lewes (1817-1878) was a philosopher, journalist, literary critic, novelist, playwright, and sometime actor. He had a fraught professional relationship with Brontë, who thought he had a touch too much of dogmatism."

6 (p. 269) *truth is considered* a *libel in speaking of such people:* Gaskell is referring to Thomas Cautley Newby, who published Emily's Wuthering Heights and Anne's *Agnes Grey* in 1847, but rejected Charlotte's manuscript of *The Professor.* Newby's unscrupulous business practices deprived both Emily and Anne Brontë proceeds from the sale of the copyrights for their novels; more damagingly, his false advertising capitalized on the success of *Jane* Eyre to portray the Bells as one person.

7 (p. 275) *"I can understand admiration of George Sand":* The French writer George Sand (1804—1876) is celebrated as much today for her bohemian lifestyle and cross-dressing as for her prolific literary output as novelist, dramatist, correspondent, memoirist, and political tract writer. "My profession is to be free," she once declared.

8 (p. 278) "beyond anything due to a Bulwer or D'Israeli production": Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873) and Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) were politicians, novelists, and friends. Bulwer-Lytton's sensationalistic bent made him one of the most popular writers of his day. Disraeli, who twice served as prime minister, wrote "condition of England" novels treating social issues. In suggesting that Lewes's novel deserves more acclaim than a Bulwer or Disraeli production, Brontë is perhaps offering faint praise.

9 (p. 278) *water-supply to each house:* Patrick Brontë campaigned the Board of Health in London for more than a decade for a clean water supply and improved sanitary conditions for Haworth. Although an inspector finally arrived in 1849 and advocated, among other measures, immediately closing the graveyard, Haworth did not receive a piped water supply until 1858. (See Barker, The Brontës, p. 814.)

10 (p. 279) *"That England may be spared the* spasms... I earnestly *pray":* Brontë fears that the working-class Chartist movement (1838-1848), which called for universal male suffrage and abolition of property qualifications

for members of Parliament, would unleash a revolution in England like those that had been spreading on the Continent.

11 (p. 286) Chatterton: The poet Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770), too avant-garde to be appreciated in his day, committed suicide at age seventeen. He later became an idol to the Romantics and Pre-Raphaelites.

CHAPTER III

1 (p. 296) *"Quarterly Review" of December,* 1848: Elizabeth Rigby's anonymous review of Jane Eyre appeared this month (see endnote 3 to volume II, chapter II).

2 (p. 297) "lama sabachthoni,"—still, *even then let him* pray... *than judge with the Pharisee:* Gaskell's defense of Brontë overdramatically culminates in Christ's appeal on the cross: "Why hast thou forsaken me?" (See the King James Version of the Bible, Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46.) For the parable of the publican and the Pharisee, see Luke 18:10-14.

3 (p. 308) *following account of the* journey—and *of the end:* Ellen Nussey provided this eyewitness account of Anne Brontë's death, albeit written in retrospect for Gaskell, who edited it.

CHAPTER IV

1 (p. 315) “three curates”: Two were based on Patrick Brontë’s former curates, James William Smith and Joseph Brett Grant, and the last on a curate of a neighboring parish. Brontë’s contempt for curates as a class is registered in a letter to Ellen Nussey: “At this blessed moment we have no less than three of them in Haworth-Parish—and God knows there is not one to mend another” (Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, June [18?], 1845; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 1, p. 399).

2 (p. 320) Mr. Hall: William Margetson Heald, the vicar of Ellen Nussey’s parish, believed that either he or his father was the model for this character (William Heald to Nussey, January 8, 1850; in Wise and Symington, vol. 3, p. 63).

3 (p. 324) *mortified her far more than actual blame:* Interestingly, the criticisms Lewes offers are not of the kind Gaskell enumerates here. Far from lowering the standard, he claims to raise the bar by taking Brontë to task for stepping ”“out of her sex—without elevating herself above it.” [G. H. Lewes], *Edinburgh Review* 91, January 1850.

4 (p. 324) *She often* writes... *the* following... *letters to Cornhill*: The following letter is to James Taylor (November 6, 1849; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 2, pp. 280-281). Gaskell suppresses Taylor’s name as correspondent here and throughout presumably because she wants to deflect the suggestion that Brontë invited his marriage proposal. Brontë continued to correspond with Taylor after she rejected his suit and he left England to head Smith, Elder’s India office.

5 (p. 325) “*I send you* a *couple of reviews:”* The reviews are: [A. W Fonblanque], *Examiner,* November 3, 1849. and [W H. Howitt], *Standard of Freedom*, November 10, 1849 (see Allot, pp. 125-129, 133-135).

6 (p. 328) *Miss* Martineau: The versatile writer and thinker Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) addressed a wide range of subjects including women’s education, religion, and political economy. Her novel *Deerbrook* (1839) influenced Brontë.

7 (p. 329) *in came* a *young-looking lady, almost child-like in stature*: In her *Autobiography* (3 vols., London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1877), Martineau describes Brontë as “the smallest creature I had ever seen (except at a fair)” (vol. 2, p. 326).

CHAPTER V

1 (pp. 332-333) *“friends have sent me books* lately... *‘Nemesis of Faith’ ”:* The books mentioned are Harriet Martineau’s Eastern Life, Present and Past (1848), Francis Newman’s *The Soul, Its Sorrows and Its Aspirations* (1849), and James Froude’s *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849).

2 (p. 333) “Mr.—.. Mr. R—... John—s wife”: Both Mr.—and Mr. R—are references to Arthur Bell Nicholls, Brontë’s future husband, on whom the one flattering portrait of a curate in Shirley is based. Brontë tells Nussey in another part of this letter that Nicholls “triumphed in his own character.” The wife of John Brown, the Haworth sexton, was Nicholls’s landlady.

3 (p. 333) “When they got the volumes at the Mechanics’ Institute”: Mechanics Institutes were cultural centers established for the use of the working classes. The one in Keighley hosted concerts, lectures, and classes, and offered a circulating library that the Brontës could use. Brontë refers in this letter to the Haworth Mechanics Institute, which was founded in 1849 with support from Brontë and her father.

4 (p. 337) “Nella Miseria—”: From Dante Alighieri’s Inferno, canto 5, lines 121-123, which reads in full: “There is no greater grief than remembering happy times in misery” (my translation).

5 (p. 338) *Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth:* James Kay Shuttleworth was a philanthropist and social reformer who was knighted for his services. Trained as a medical doctor, he worked to improve sanitary conditions among the poor and working classes in order to combat disease. He was also an early champion of national education. Sir James’s avocation was entertaining celebrated authors. It was at his estate near Windermere that Gaskell and Brontë met.

6 (p. 340) “Unprotected Female’ ”: The “Unprotected Female” was a series of sketches that appeared in the periodical Punch (founded in 1841) from 1849 to 1850. *Punch*, established by social reformer Henry May-hew (1812-1887) and journalists Joseph Stirling Coyne and Mark Lemon, blended political commentary and humorous cartoons.

7 (p. 341) *"that, too, I read, and with unalloyed pleasure":* The most recent collection of essays by William Hazlitt would have been *Winterslow: Essays and Characters Written There* (1850). The other titles are Charles Cuthbert Southey's edition of *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey* (1849-1850); Julia Kavanagh, *Woman in France During the Eighteenth Century* (1850); Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men: Seven* Lectures (1850); and A. J. Scott, *Suggestions on Female Education* (1849).

CHAPTER VI

1 (p. 344) “I *had thought to bring the ‘Leader’: The Leader* (1850) was a radical literary periodical founded by G. H. Lewes.

2 (p. 347) *to join the friends with whom she had been staying in town:* Gaskell skims over the unorthodox nature of Brontë’s trip to Scotland with George Smith, an unmarried man, and his sister. Both Smith’s mother and Ellen Nussey urged against it. Brontë reassures Ellen: “My six or eight years of seniority not to say nothing of lack of all pretension to beauty &c. are a perfect safeguard—I should not in the least fear to go with him to China” (Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, June 20, 1850; in *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë, vol. 2, p. 419).

3 (p. 349) “Papa *had worked himself up to* a *sad* pitch... *obviously joining him”:* The letter continues: “I can’t deny but I was annoyed.... Papa’s great discomposure had its origin in ... the vague fear of my being somehow about to be married to somebody.” In editing out this portion of the letter Gaskell suppresses Patrick’s fear that Brontë and George Smith had formed a romantic attachment.

CHAPTER VII

1 (p. 352) *I shall probably convey my first* impressions... a *longer description:* The text that follows is extracted from two of Gaskell's letters. One is to Catherine Winkworth, on August 25, 1850, and another, written on the same date, is to an unknown correspondent.

2 (p. 353) *"liking 'Modern* Painters'... *Father Newman's Lectures":* John Ruskin (1819-1900) wrote *Modern Painters* (1843-1860) and The *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849). Father Newman, later a cardinal, is John Henry Newman (1801-1890), a leader of the Oxford Movement within the Anglican Church. He later converted to Roman Catholicism.

3 (p. 353) "*invitation to drink* tea *quietly* at *Fox How":* Fox How was the home of the widow and children of Dr. Thomas Arnold (1795-1842), moralist, social reformer and educational theorist. The curricular innovations Arnold instituted as headmaster of Rugby School influenced the course of British education. He was the father of poet and critic Matthew Arnold (1822-1888).

4 (p. 356) *'Westminster Review':* The *Westminster Review* was a reform-minded periodical acquired by John Stuart Mill in 1836.

5 (p. 357) "*I have read Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' "*: On Gaskell's recommendation Brontë read, or rather, attempted to read Alfred Tennyson's In *Memoriam* (1850), an elegy to his friend Arthur Henry Hallam. Presumably to educate her new friend in her own aesthetic preferences, Brontë sends Gaskell the final edition of Wordsworth's autobiographical *The Prelude,* which was published posthumously in 1850.

6 (p. 359) "*I should be glad if you would* include... 'Life of Dr. Arnold'": Brontë wanted to read Arthur Penrhyn Stanley's Life and *Correspondence of Thomas* Arnold (1844).

CHAPTER VIII

1 (p. 360) *task of editing them:* Brontë wrote a “Biographical Notice” of her sisters for this edition, published by Smith, Elder and Company, and she appended a heavily edited selection of their poetry.

2 (p. 361) *That gentleman* says:—: G. H. Lewes, writing to George Smith. Gaskell wanted input from Lewes but, unlike Brontë, would not correspond with him directly because of his reputed immorality *(The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell,* letter 314). In 1854 he dissolved his open marriage to live with writer George Eliot.

3 (p. 362) *“I lent her some of Balzac’s and George Sand’s novels”:* The novels of Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) that G. H. Lewes is talking about are *Modeste Mignon* (1844) and *Illusions Perdues* (1837-1843). Gaskell is quick to give anecdotal evidence of Brontë’s “disgust” for Balzac, who was not considered proper reading for a lady. George Sand’s Lettres d’un *Voyageur (Letters of* a *Traveler),* part autobiography, part travel narrative, appeared in 1837.

4 (p. 366) “ ‘The Roman’ ”: *The Roman* (1850) was a poem by Sydney Dobell, the critic who had endeared himself to Brontë with his praise of Wuthering *Heights.*

CHAPTER IX

1 (p. 372) “*You* ask *me whether Miss Martineau made me convert to mesmerism”:* Mesmerism, a form of hypnotism thought to cure disease, was first practiced by Franz Mesmer (1734-1815), a Viennese physician. Harriet Martineau was a believer.

2 (p. 373) *Your account of Mr. A—*”: Henry Atkinson and Martineau coauthored *Letters on the Laws of Man’s Nature and Development* (1851).

3 (p. 377) *great Exhibition:* The Great Exhibition of 1851, held at the Crystal Palace in London, was an international industrial show intendedto showcase British ascendancy. Brontë visited it five tim“under coercion.” On a subsequent trip to London, Brontë made her own itinerary and “selected the *real* in preference to the decorative side of life” (see the Introduction).

4 (p. 386) “‘Phrenological Character’” : Phrenology was a pseudo-science in which a person’s character was analyzed by examining his or her skull structure. Brontë and George Smith posed as brother and sister and had a phrenological reading done by a physician in London. See Gérin, Appendix B, for his report.

CHAPTER X

1 (p. 389) *"I have read the 'Saint's Tragedy' ":* Brontë is referring to The Saint's *Tragedy: or, The True Story of Elizabeth of Hungary* (1848) , by Charles Kingsley (1819-1875).

2 (p. 391) *"James Martineau's sermons":* James Martineau (1805-1900), brother of Harriet Martineau, was a Unitarian minister and moral philosopher.

3 (p. 391) *"I have seen none,* except ... *Emancipation of Women"*: The article is "The Enfranchisement of Women," which appeared in the *Westminster Review* 55 (July 1851): 289-311. Although J. S. Mill is given authorial credit, Harriet Taylor (1807-1858), Mill's collaborator, companion, and eventually his wife, is believed to have been the primary author.

4 (p. 396) *"Melville seemed to* me... *Maurice whose ministry I should frequent":* The Evangelical Henry Melville (1798-1871) was considered one of the greatest preachers of his day. F. D. Maurice (1805-1872), a Christian Socialist, believed the church should be an instrument of social equality.

5 (p. 403) *"the close seemed to me scarcely equal to 'Rose Douglas' "*: Sarah R. Whitehead wrote *Rose Douglas; or, Sketches of* a *Country Parish, Being the Autobiography of* a *Scotch Minister's Daughter* (1851) and *Two Families* (1852).

6 (p. 403) *"I read Miss* Kavanagh's *'Women of Christianity' "*: The full title of Julia Kavanagh's book is *Women of Christianity: Exemplary for Acts of Piety and Charity* (1852).

7 (p. 416) *"I called her 'Lucy Snowe'* ... 'lucus a non lucendo' *principle"*: The principle is an etymological contradiction. The word lucus means "dark grove" in Latin, but it is derived from the verb *lucere*, "to shine," based on the absence of light. Similarly, Lucy Snowe's "external coldness" belies her inner fire.

8 (p. 418) *some word or act of hers had given offence:* Gaskell minimizes Brontë's fears here to gloss over her true cause for concern—the fact that she had represented George Smith and his mother in Villette as Mrs. Bretton and her son Dr. John. Smith later owned that the portraits were based on his mother and him.

CHAPTER XII

1 (p. 421) *put aside all consideration of how she should reply, excepting* as *he wished!:* Brontë had her own reservations about marrying Nicholls, independent of her father's objections. See the Introduction.

2 (p. 424) *Miss* Martineau... *wounded her to the* quick... *merely artistic* fault: In her review of *Villette* in the *Daily News,* February 3, 1853 (Allot, pp. 171-174), Martineau faulted Brontë for making love too central to the lives of her female characters, insisting that there "are substantial, heartfelt interests for women of all ages, and under ordinary circumstances, quite apart from love."

3 (p. 426) *"I read attentively all you say about Miss* Martineau... *hundreds have forsaken her":* Martineau objected to this characterization, and to Gaskell's account of her rift with Brontë. In the third edition Gaskell included a footnote and additional material in the body of the text to represent Martineau's side of the story, which was, in the main, a reiteration of the fact that Brontë urged her to be frank with her criticism.

4 (p. 438) *Mrs.* Marsh's *story* ... *Miss Bremer's story:* Anne Marsh-Caldwell wrote "The Deformed," published in *Two Old Men's Tales* (1834); Fredrika Bremer wrote *The Neighbours* (translated in 1842).

5 (p. 440) Mr. Brontë became reconciled to the idea of his daughter's marriage: Gaskell may have directly contributed to this change of heart by asking Richard Monckton Milnes to use his influence to secure a pension that would increase Nicholls's income. Gaskell urged secrecy: "If my well-meant treachery becomes known I will lose her friendship, which I prize most highly" (The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, letter 168).

6 (p. 443) *"my father's* sympathies... are all *with Justice* and *Europe, against Tyranny and Russia"*: Brontë refers here to the diplomatic prelude to the Crimean War.

7 (p. 451) *natural cause for her miserable indisposition:* Brontë's letters to Nussey indicate that she was pregnant. It is unclear whether her death was caused by a complication of pregnancy or by an infectious disease.

THE LEGACY OF *THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË*

Throughout The Life of Charlotte Brontë Elizabeth Gaskell claims Brontë as her “dear friend.” Their status as leading Victorian novelists initially brought the two women to each other’s notice, and as they embarked upon their friendship, professional appreciation quickly translated into a deep personal connection. In the mid-nineteenth century, Gaskell was the more popular novelist, but her renown gradually faded after her death, while Brontë’s fame grew after she died. Brontë’s continued popularity owes much to Gaskell’s Life, and Gaskell’s enduring reputation has been earned as much from her only attempt at biography as from her novels. This mutual benefit to two authors—subject and biographer—echoes that which resulted following James Boswell’s publication in 1791 of *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, LL.D.; widely considered the greatest biography in the English language, it enhanced the reputation of both men.

While some readers now consider Gaskell’s fiction overly sentimental, others continue to enjoy her novels of manners *Cranford* (1853) and *Wives and Daughters* (1866), and to read and study her “condition of England” novels *Mary Barton* (1848) and North and South (1854), which prove particularly enduring as they shed light on the social history of their time. As for *The Life of Charlotte* Brontë, it is the depth of the work and the sympathy the writer obviously felt for her subject that make it compelling to readers today. Much of the book’s immediate and continued success derives from Gaskell’s talent for, as Eneas Sweetland Dallas put it in Blackwood’s *Edinburgh Magazine*, “personal discourse and familiar narrative,” novelistic touches that were enthusiastically received by a reading public thirsty for confidences and scandal.

Most dramatically, Gaskell describes the plight of Charlotte’s feckless brother, Branwell, who, she alleges, engaged in a sexual liaison with Lydia Robinson, the wife of the man who had hired him as a tutor. The present text of *The Life of Charlotte* Brontë is that of the first 479 edition, which includes Gaskell’s original and full “account of Branwell Brontë’s wretched fate,” as William Caldwell Roscoe described it in the *National Review*,

adding that it was “recorded with unnecessary detail.” Here is what Gaskell wrote:

[Branwell’s] case presents the reverse of the usual features; the man became the victim; the man’s life was blighted, and crushed out of him by suffering, and guilt entailed by guilt; the man’s family were stung by keenest shame. The woman—to think of her father’s pious name—the blood of honourable families mixed in her veins—her early home, underneath whose rooftree sat those whose names are held saintlike for their good deeds,—she goes flaunting about to this day in respectable society; a showy woman for her age; kept afloat by her reputed wealth. I see her name in county papers, as one of those who patronize the Christmas balls; and I hear of her in London drawing-rooms (p. 223 in this edition).

As Gaskell prepares to quote from some of Charlotte’s letters to bolster her case against Robinson, she continues, “Now let us read, not merely of the suffering of her guilty accomplice but of the misery she caused to innocent victims, whose premature deaths may, in part, be laid at her door.”

Gaskell’s version of Branwell’s affair with Robinson provoked a strong reaction in the press. James Fitzjames Stephen, writing in the Edinburgh Review, railed against Gaskell: “No doubt, from mistaken information and mistaken motives... she appears to have entirely misconceived the duties and the rights of her position as an authoress.” Stephen continued, “A man’s honour, a woman’s virtue, are not to be blown to the winds merely because it suits the humour of a romancer to rake up some imaginary or forgotten transgression—to dress it in colours of fiction, heightened by the mischievous attraction of personal slander.”

Not only was Lydia Robinson still living when the Life was published, she was a prominent member of London society (she had remarried and become Lady Scott). Upon publication of the book, she immediately filed a libel suit against Gaskell; as a result, all unsold copies of *The Life of Charlotte* Brontë were pulled from the shelves. In a letter from Mrs. Gaskell’s solicitor that appeared in the London *Times*, the author endeavored “*to retract every statement* contained in that work which imputes to a widowed lady, referred to, but not named therein, any breach of her conjugal, of her maternal, and of her social duties, &c.” All

subsequent editions of the Life were issued as “revised,” to indicate that all passages deemed incriminating to Lady Scott had been removed.

To the advantage of both Brontë and Gaskell, the Life has outlived the topical scandal that plagued its initial publication to become one of the most widely read biographies written in English.

COMMENTS & QUESTIONS

In this section, we aim *to provide the reader with* an array *of perspectives on the text,* as *well* as *questions that* challenge *those perspectives. The commentary has been culled from sources as diverse* as *reviews contemporaneous with the work, letters written by the author, literary criticism of* later *generations*, and appreciations *written throughout the work's history. Following the* commentary, a *series of questions seeks to filter Elizabeth* Gaskell's *The Life of* Charlotte Brontë *through* a *variety of points of view* and *bring* about a *richer understanding of this enduring work.*

Comments

HENRY FOTHERGILL CHORLEY

The story of a woman's life unfolded in this book is calculated to make the old feel young and the young old. Persons who have been conversant with society and manners as they existed in the remote corners of England within the century will feel themselves strangely recalled to the narrow homes, the grim prejudices, the few pleasures and privileges belonging to a period of heavy taxation, costly literature, and limited intercourse, by the picture of a provincial parsonage and its inmates here set before them. Some of those, on the other hand, who are bursting with life, and brimming with creative power, may feel palsied (as it were by some cold prophecy) while they follow the record of a career of self-denial and struggle, sustained to the last with courage, principle, and genius, but without hope. Nevertheless, a true tale of what may be achieved in spite of disabilities, be the facts ever so cheerless, let the pilgrim's lot have been cast on ever so rugged a road, let his cup have been ever so full of the waters of bitterness, can hardly be followed to its close without some strength being gained for the reader. By all, this book will be read with interest. As a work of Art, we do not recollect a life of a woman by a woman so well executed....

Protracted life and success, and increased experience with what is best in society (not what is most convenient in observance), might have ripened, and mellowed, and smoothed the creations of this singular novelist without destroying their charm of force and individuality. But conjecture stops at the grave-side. At the time when “the silver lining of the cloud” began to show itself, when domestic cherishing and prosperity seemed to await her after so many hard, dark, cruel years, the end came. All this is gently and sadly told by Mrs. Gaskell, with whom the task has been a labour of love (a little, also, of defence),—and who, we repeat, has produced one of the best biographies of a woman by a woman we can recall to mind.

—from an unsigned review in *The Athenaeum* (April 4, 1857)

THE SPECTATOR

Besides the actual poverty of incident that characterizes this life, the materials for largely illustrating it, such as it was, even in its later period, and still more in its growing time, are wanting. Very little correspondence can have passed between the Misses Brontë and other people, and of that little less had been preserved. Their father, who has survived them, is very old and infirm, and little more than vague general recollections seem to have been obtained from him. Charlotte does not appear to have been communicative about herself and her proceedings while she lived, and she lived in such retirement and isolation that no one now seems able to describe minutely what she left unrecorded. Yet in spite of these disadvantages, it is impossible to read through Mrs. Gaskell’s two volumes without a strong conviction that Charlotte Brontë was a woman as extraordinary by her character as by her genius. She possessed in a remarkable degree, not only the poetical imagination shown in her works, but an unconquerable will, and a sense of duty to which everything in her life was subordinated....

Those who can be powerfully interested by character developing itself without striking outward incident—who can follow the drama of the inner life in a lonely parsonage, where three eccentric girls, and an eccentric father, with an equally eccentric old Yorkshire servant, for the most part lead an existence of which one day is precisely in its outward aspect like

every other—will find in Mrs. Gaskell's account of Charlotte Brontë and her family one of the profoundest tragedies of modern life, if tragedy be, as we believe it to be, the contest of humanity with inexorable fate—the anguish and the strife through which the spirit nerves itself for a grander sphere—the martyr's pang, and the saint's victory.

—April 4, 1857

GEORGE HENRY LEWES

I have just finished your "Life of Charlotte Bronte"—which has afforded exquisite delight to my evenings on this remote patch of rock, round which the Atlantic roars, and dashes like a troop of lions, making a solitude almost equal to Haworth moors—quite equal, as far as any society I get here. If I had any public means of expressing my high sense of the skill, delicacy and artistic power of your Biography, I should not trouble you with this note. But it is a law of the literary organization that it must relieve itself in expression, and I discharge my emotion through the penny post; at least, such of it as was not discharged in wet eyes and swelling heart, as chapter after chapter was read.

The book will, I think, create a deep and permanent impression; for it not only presents a vivid picture of a life noble and sad, full of encouragement and healthy teaching, a lesson in duty and self-reliance; it also, thanks to its artistic power, makes us familiar inmates of an interior so strange, so original in its individual elements and so picturesque in its externals—it paints for us at once the psychological drama and the scenic accessories with so much vividness—that fiction has nothing more wild, touching, and heart-strengthening to place above it.

The early part is a triumph for you; the rest a monument for your friend. One learns to love Charlotte, and deeply to respect her. Emily has a singular fascination for me—probably because I have a passion for lions and savage animals, and she was *une* bête *fauve* in power, splendour, and wildness. What an episode that death of hers! and how touching is Charlotte's search for the bit of heather which the glazed eyes could not recognize at last! And what a bit of the true religion of home is the whole biography!

—from a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell (April 15, 1857)

ENEAS SWEETLAND DALLAS

Women ought to be good biographers. They have a talent for personal discourse and familiar narrative, which, when properly controlled, is a great gift, although too frequently it degenerates into a social nuisance. Mrs. Gaskell, we regret to say, has, in the present work, so employed her talent that she appears too much in the latter light—as a gossip and a gad-about. There was not much to say of Charlotte Brontë, better known as Currer Bell, but the biographer was determined to say a great deal: she therefore makes a pilgrimage to every spot where her heroine was ever known to have set her foot. First of all, she devotes a chapter to Haworth, counting all the rooms and all the windows in the parsonage. The next chapter she devotes to a description of the character of Yorkshiremen, who appear to be the most unsocial beings on the face of the earth. In the third chapter she hies away to Cornwall, gives a long account of the customs of Penzance, Mrs. Brontë's birthplace; favours us with some of this lady's letters to her husband in the days of their courtship; informs us how Mr. Brontë used to saw off the backs of chairs, fire pistols through doors when he was angry, tear his wife's silk dress to shreds, and every day of his life eat his dinner all alone by himself With amazing rapidity she then relates the birth of half-a-dozen children, kills off Mrs. Brontë, and sends Charlotte to school. Here comes a grand opportunity for describing the school at Cowanbridge—how it was started, where it was situated, who were the managers, what were the rules, how the girls were fed. Then comes another school at Roehead, and the biographer writes a gazetteer of the neighbourhood from the days of the Stuarts downwards. So she dwells on every incident. Miss Brontë, in passing through London, went to the Chapter Coffeehouse: Mrs. Gaskell, therefore, gives us the history of that tavern, carefully describes the different rooms, makes us familiar with the waiters, and enlarges on the kind of custom on which the house depends. Miss Brontë went to a school at Brussels: her biographer, therefore, beginning with the thirteenth century, writes the history of the Rue d'Isabelle, in which the school is situated, quotes long pages of Charlotte's French exercises, with all her teacher's corrections; is great on the subject of the school hours, the kind of rolls for supper, the number of lamps in the refectory, and presents us with an inventory of the bedroom furniture. All this information of the Dame

Quickly sort, with which every chapter abounds, Mrs. Gaskell has seasoned with as much petty scandal as might suffice for half-a-dozen biographies.... The biographer even tries to persuade herself that the sad history of Branwell's intrigue, every word of which she has since been obliged ignominiously to retract, is given to the public, not at all from any love of scandal, but in the Christian hope that it may meet the eye, and bring repentance to the heart, of the cruel lady who survives, and who is said to mix in the best society of the metropolis. Without pretending to half so high an opinion of Currer Bell as her biographer professes to entertain, we respect her too much not to condemn such an outrage upon her memory, committed in the name of friendship and sky-high religion. If it was impossible to write the biography without entering into these details, then it ought never to have been written. Whoever could speak in this vein of Currer Bell and her relations, has no genuine sympathy with that retiring nature who shrank from popular observation. Mrs. Gaskell is, indeed, lavish of her sympathy; but it is of the patronising apologetic kind, feeling for rather than with the sufferer; crushing her with condescension, overpowering her with affection, and rejoicing itself with a copious discharge of those cheap protestations which Sairey Gamp, over her brown teapot, might offer to Betsy Prig. If we do Mrs. Gaskell any injustice, we ask her pardon, and we dare say that in reality she is very different from the author of these volumes, who appears in the character of a shallow, showy woman, fond of her own prattle, and less intent on describing Currer Bell (even if it be by saying that she is "half a head shorter than I am"), than on speaking of "myself," "my husband," "our little girls," "an aunt of mine," "a friend of mine," "a visit I paid," "a letter I received," "what I partly knew," and "what my feelings were."

—from an unsigned review in Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine* (July 1857)

JAMES FITZJAMES STEPHEN

Nor can we, with a due regard to literary justice, pass over in silence the grave offence of a similar character of which Mrs. Gaskell, the biographer of Miss Brontë, has herself been guilty. The life of this remarkable woman

has been read with an avidity which does not surprise us, for both the subject and the manner of the book are well calculated to excite the deepest interest. But Mrs. Gaskell appears to have learnt the art of the novel-writer so well that she cannot discharge from her palette the colours she has used in the pages of ‘Mary Barton’ and ‘Ruth.’ This biography opens precisely like a novel, and the skilful arrangement of lights and shades and colours—the prominence of some objects and the evident suppression of others—leave on the mind the excitement of a highly-wrought drama, rather than the simplicity of daylight and of nature. To heighten the interest of this strange representation, and also to assert her own imperious sense of moral obligations, the biographer has thought it proper and necessary to introduce the episode of Branwell Brontë, a worthless brother of the three mysterious Bells, whose misconduct added a pang to their dreary existence; and in giving the history of this scapegrace Mrs. Gaskell has allowed herself to enter into details affecting the character and conduct of living persons, on whom she proceeds to pass sentence in a tone for which she now feels, or ought to feel, great shame and regret. It turns out that these details were borrowed from imperfect or incorrect evidence; no effort seems to have been made to verify the facts on which Mrs. Gaskell proceeded to consign another woman to infamy and to brand her with maledictions. The name and station of the lady thus assailed were easily identified, and it became known that she is a member of a highly honourable family; legal proceedings were threatened, and we believe commenced, to vindicate her reputation; and on the 30th May a letter appeared in the ‘Times’ newspaper from Mrs. Gaskell’s solicitor, stating that he was instructed ‘*to retract every statement* contained in that work which imputes to a widowed lady, referred to, but not named therein, any breach of her conjugal, of her maternal, and of her social duties, &c ... [and] to express the deep regret of Mrs. Gaskell that she should have been led to make them.’ This apology has been accepted; though the disavowal of the false statements would have been more becoming to both parties, if it had not been conveyed in the studied phraseology of an attorney.

—from an unsigned review in the *Edinburgh Review* (July 1857)

PATRICK BRONTË

I am much pleased with reading the opinions of those in your letters, and other eminent characters, respecting the “Memoir.” Before I knew their’s I had formed my own opinion, and the reading World’s opinion of the “Memoir” is, that it is in every way worthy of what one Great Woman, should have written of Another, and that it ought to stand, and will stand in the first rank, of Biographies, till the end of time.

—from a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell (July 30, 1857)

HENRY JAMES

[Mrs. Gaskell’s] “Life of Charlotte Brontë,” for instance, although a very readable and delightful book, is one which a woman of strong head could not possibly have written; for, full as it is of fine qualities, of affection, of generosity, of sympathy, of imagination, it lacks the prime requisites of a good biography. It is written with a signal want of judgment and of critical power; and it has always seemed to us that it tells the reader considerably more about Mrs. Gaskell than about Miss Brontë.

—from *The Nation* (February 22, 1866)

Questions

1. Can one write a biography without possessing a store of empathy or antipathy for the subject? What would you surmise is the basis for Gaskell’s empathy for, or identification with, Brontë?
2. Do Brontë’s letters reveal a side of her character that Gaskell does not explore? Do Brontë’s own words ever contradict Gaskell’s claims? Do you feel that Gaskell always understands her subject correctly? If not, can you point to moments in the Life when Brontë’s own words jar against Gaskell’s interpretation of them?
3. Do you ever feel while reading this biography that Gaskell is less interested in Brontë the individual than in Brontë the symbol of the suppression of women?

4. Can you identify literary techniques (foreshadowing, compression, metaphor) that Gaskell, a novelist, brings to bear on Brontë's life story? If so, what impact do these techniques have on the narrative?
5. How would you characterize Gaskell's relationship to the reader? Does she directly address the reader at times? At what moments does she do so, and to what effect?
6. Do you get a sense of Brontë's character development over the course of Gaskell's biography? Can you trace a character arc? What are the culminating moments of Brontë's life story as it is shaped by Gaskell?

FOR FURTHER READING

Charlotte Bronte

CORRESPONDENCE

Barker, Juliet, ed. *The* Brontës: *A* Life in *Letters.* Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2002. This readily available paperback edition is an excellent starter for those interested in exploring the Brontës' correspondence.

Smith, Margaret, ed. *The Letters of Charlotte* Brontë. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995-2004. This long-awaited, scrupulously annotated edition is the most reliable source of Charlotte Brontë's letters.

Wise, T. J., and J. A. Symington, eds. *The* Brontës: *Their Lives, Friendships, and Correspondence.* 1932; 4 vols., Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1980. Although sometimes unreliable, this remains the most comprehensive source of letters by and to the Brontës.

WORKS

Alexander, Christine, ed. An *Edition of the Early Writings of Charlotte* Brontë. *2* vols. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987—1991.The most comprehensive collection of the juvenilia.

Winnifrith, Tom, ed. *The Poems of Charlotte* Brontë. Oxford: Blackwell, 1984.

For those looking to venture beyond Brontë's prose writings.

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Barker, Juliet. *The* Brontës. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995. A meticulously researched history of the Brontë family.

Fraser, Rebecca. Charlotte Brontë. London: Methuen London, 1988. Highly readable and reliable.

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Gordon, Lyndall. *Charlotte* Brontë: *A Passionate Life.* New York: W W Norton, 1995. A perceptive, impressionistic bio-critical account.

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OTHER

Alexander, Christine, and Margaret Smith, eds. *The Oxford Companion to the* Brontës. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. A remarkably detailed and scholarly compendium of facts relating to the Brontës' lives and works.

Pollard, Arthur. *The Landscape of the* Brontës. New York: E. P Dutton, 1988. Contains a trove of photographs illustrating places the Brontës lived, visited, and featured in their novels.

Elizabeth Gaskell

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Easson, Angus. *Elizabeth Gaskell.* London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

Uglow, Jenny. *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories.* New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1993. Detailed and engaging bio-critical study.

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D'Albertis, Deirdre. *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell* and the *Victorian Social Text.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Easson, Angus. *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Critical Heritage.* London and New York: Routledge, 1991. A collection of contemporary reviews of Gaskell's work.

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Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre.* 1847. New York and London: Norton, 1987. . *Villette.* 1853. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

a

John Tiplady Carrodus (1836—1895), a child prodigy violinist born at Keighley, Yorkshire.

b

The tablet is in error. Anne Brontë was twenty-nine when she died.

c

Alphonse de Lamartine, Lajos Kossuth, and Henrik Dembinsky were nationalists active in the French, Hungarian, and Polish revolutionary movements of 1848.

d

Critical consensus is that this should read “bed plays.”

e

Hugh Blair, a Scottish Presbyterian preacher, lectured and wrote about writing style. *His Lectures on Rhetoric* and *Belles Lettres* (1783) was translated into many European languages.

f

Elizabeth Rowe, *Friendship in Death: In Twenty Letters, from the Dead to the Living* (1728).

g

Walter Scott, Scottish poet and novelist, wrote the novel Kenilworth (1821).

h

“Jane Eyre,” Vol. I., page 20.

i

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), early epistolary novelist, author of Pamela (1740), Clarissa (1747-1748), and The History of Sir Charles Grandison (1753-1754).

j

Gaskell is mistaken; Brontë wrote to Hartley Coleridge (see endnote 6 to volume I, chapter VIII), not Wordsworth.

k

Mr. Collins, curate at Keighley, and William Weightman (see endnote 11 to volume I, chapter VIII).

l

M. is Mary Taylor, and G. is Gomersal, her home. B. is Ellen Nussey's home, Brookroyd.

m

Taylor, Mary's sister.

n

The Château de Kokelberg was the Brussels finishing school attended by Mary and Martha Taylor.

o

Scott describes the sport, "Shooting at the Popinjay," "as an ancient game formerly practised with archery, but at this period (1679) with fire arms. This was the figure of a bird decked with parti-coloured feathers, so as to resemble a popinjay or parrot. It was suspended to a pole, and served for a mark at which the competitors discharged their fusees and carbines in rotation, at the distance of seventy paces. He whose ball brought down the mark held the proud title of Captain of the Popinjay for the remainder of the day, and was usually escorted in triumph to the most respectable change-house in the neighbourhood, where the evening was closed with conviviality, conducted under his auspices, and, if he was able to maintain it, at his expense."—Old Mortality.

p

Catherine Wooler, one of the sisters who ran the school Brontë attended at Roe Head. (see endnote 1 to volume I, chapter VI).

q

Devoirs (no accent) are composition exercises.

r

Peter the Hermit (c.1050-1115), a leader of the First Crusade (begun in 1096).

s

She was nourished on the Bible (French).

t

The “long vacation” (French) ran from mid-August to October.

u

That is, the Dixon family.

v

The Wheelwrights; Laetitia, the eldest daughter, would become Brontë’s lifelong friend.

w

Catholic devotional readings (French).

x

Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). part 2, line 32: “Hills peep o’er Hills, and Alps on Alps arise! ”

y

Deo Volente (Latin) means “God willing.” steeped in a kind of cold, systematic sensuality, than she had before imagined it possible for a human being to be; and her whole nature revolted from this woman’s society. A low nervous fever was gaining upon Miss Brontë. She had never been a good sleeper, but now she could not sleep at all. Whatever had been disagreeable, or obnoxious, to her during the day, was presented when it was over with exaggerated vividness to her disordered fancy. There were causes for distress and anxiety in the news from home, particularly as regarded Branwell. 3 In the dead of the night, lying awake at the end of the long deserted dormitory, in the vast and silent house, every fear respecting those whom she loved, and who were so far off in another country, became a terrible reality, oppressing her and choking up the very life-blood in her heart. Those nights were times of sick, dreary, wakeful misery; precursors of many such in after years.

z

Mary Taylor emigrated to New Zealand.

aa

The Reverend Edmund Robinson.

ab

Lydia Robinson’s father was the Reverend Thomas Gisborne, a prominent Evangelical.

ac

The character of Joe Taylor, Mary’s brother, is under discussion.

ad

Brontë’s The Professor (1857) was edited and published posthumously by Arthur Bell Nicholls.

ae

Margaret Wooler.

af

Anne, Ellen Nussey’s sister, afterward referred to as A.

ag

“She” is Amelia Ringrose, the future wife of Joe Taylor.

ah

Ellen Nussey.

ai

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811—1863).

aj

Thackeray’s pseudonym.

ak

Brontë seeks advice regarding Thomas Newby, Emily and Anne Brontë’s unscrupulous publisher.

al

The title of an early novel (published 1847) by British critic and author G. H. Lewes.

am

The title of a novel by G. H. Lewes, published in 1848.

an

Evangelical (Low Church) clergyman Charles Simeon (1759—1836) helped found the Church Missionary Society.

ao

Smelling salts.

ap

The Robinson daughters, Elizabeth and Mary.

aq

John **Forbes, physician to the Queen.**

ar

Margaret Wooler was supposedly the model for Mrs. Pryor.

as

The Yorkes were based on the Taylor family. ‡The daguerreotype was an early form of photograph, produced on a silver-coated copper plate.

at

The Rev. Hammond Roberson (see endnote 7 to volume II, chapter VI) was the original for Mr. Helstone.

au

Frances Atkinson, Brontë's godmother.

av

The Athenaeum, a weekly periodical founded in 1828, covered the arts and sciences.

aw

Eugène Forçade. *Revue des Deux Mondes*, November 15, 1849 (see Allot, ed., *The* Brontës: *The* Critical *Heritage*, pp. 142-146; see "For Further Reading").

ax

London.

ay

The Times, December 7, 1849 (seeAllot, pp. 148-151).

az

December 9 is the correct date.

ba

George Smith’s mother often served as Brontë’s hostess and chaperone in London.

bb

Laetitia Wheelwright.

bc

Margaret Wooler.

bd

Thackeray’s novel, published in installments (1848-1850).

be

Julia Kavanagh (1824-1877), novelist.

bf

The Nusseys.

bg

Greenwood (see endnote 1 to volume I, chapter XIV). ‡ George Smith commissioned George Richmond (1809-1896), who also drew Gaskell, to undertake Brontë’s portrait.

bh

Catherine Gore (1799-1861), a “silver-fork novelist,” depicted life in high society.

bi

Eliza Fox (later Bridell), painter and friend of Gaskell.

bj

Lady Kay Shuttleworth.

bk

Sir James Kay Shuttleworth.

bl

John Manners (1818-1906) and George Smythe (1818-1857) were both active in Disraeli's "Young England" group, which promoted a romantic and aristocratic type ofToryism.

bm

[Sydney Dobell], Palladium, September 1850 (see Allot, pp. 277-283).

bn

Dobell likened Brontë to the Amazon warrior queen Penthesilea in the review he wrote for the Palladium.

bo

English critic John Ruskin wrote *The Stones of* Venice (1851-1853), on Venetian architecture.

bp

James Taylor, manager of Smith, Elder and Company, proposed to Brontë on or near April 4, 1851.

bq

The lecture series was titled The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century.

br

Richard Monckton Milnes (1809-1885), a minor poet and reform-minded politician.

bs

George Smith's mother.

bt

Elisa Félix (1820-1858) was the model for Vashti in Villette.

bu

Literary patron Samuel Rogers (1763-1855).

bv

“When found, make a note of” is the byword of Captain Cuttle in Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* (1847).

bw

Laurence Sterne (1713-1768), author known for the novels *Tristram Shandy* (1760-1767) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768).

bx

Gaskell’s daughter Margaret.

by

A reference to Gaskell’s The Moorland *Cottage* (1850).

bz

Marianne was Gaskell’s eldest daughter, Julia her youngest. Florence was her third.

ca

Fredrika Bremer (1801-1865) was a Swedish novelist.

cb

Brontë to James Taylor (in India), November 15, 1851.

cc

Thackeray, *Henry Esmond* (1852), a novel about eighteenth-century life.

cd

Presumably Charles Dickens is meant as the first writer of the day.

ce

Ellen Taylor.

cf

Lumpkin is the trickster son in Oliver Goldsmith’s play She Stoops to *Conquer* (1773).

cg

Gaskell was working on her controversial novel Ruth (1853).

ch

Amelia Taylor, Joe Taylor’s wife.

ci

Novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe, published in 1852.

cj

Arthur Bell Nicholls came to Haworth as curate in May 1845.

ck

The reference is to Dinah Maria Mulock Craik (1826-1887), essayist, novelist, and children’s author.

cl

Joe and Amelia Taylor.

cm

The reference is to Sydney Dobell’s unfinished modern epic, published in 1854.

cn

Gaskell is intimating that Brontë is pregnant.

co

Flossy was Anne’s spaniel.

cp

John Forster, The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith (1848).